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4. Taoism and Pragmatic Drug Therapy: From Antifeudal Social Theory to Individualistic Practices of Longevity (pp. 101-116).

4.1. SOCIAL THEORY OF EARLY TAOISM

As I have previously indicated, the teachings of Confucius and his successors were not the only ideological reaction of Chinese intellectuals to the disruptive circumstances prevailing during the period of the Warring States (481-221 B.C.). One of the numerous alternative systems of ideas offering elucidation of the causes and the promise of reversing the period of decadent decline was Taoism. Since proponents of this philosophy of nature and society also had a direct influence on the conceptualization and practice of Chinese healing, I will now discuss those aspects of Taoism that were significant for the development of Chinese medicine.

The designation Taoism generally groups together differing, sometimes even antithetical, intellectual currents that do not have much more in common than a conception of the tao, the unfathomable law of nature. Confucianism also referred to the tao, but the concept meant something like the correct manner of human coexistence in society. This points to one of the fundamental differences between the two doctrines. If the Confucians believed they could derive an understanding of man from a study of man himself, the highest of all creatures, the Taoists felt that the observation of nature also provided insight into man, a creature that in the final analysis was no better than the lowest worm. But the Taoists were not so much concerned with an understanding of man himself as with the knowledge of how man can best conform to the laws of nature. Thus, "no active intervention" (wu-wei) is one of the central and best-known Taoist precepts. Whereas Confucians trusted implicitly in the moral power (te), resulting from adherence to a detailed system of rites, to rectify the political situation, the Taoists of the fourth, third, and subsequent centuries B.C. explicitly rejected such submissive infringements, basing their own doctrine on the potential (te) that arises from adaptation to the Way of Nature (tao). The title and contents of the Taoist classic Tao-te ching clearly express these conceptions. Adaptation, conformity, passivity, and weakness—not independent action, control, and intervention—were the values derived from these ideals. Three passages from the Tao-te ching, in the words of the author, Lao-tzu, serve to illustrate these points:

Man is weak and pliant when he is born, solid and strong when he dies.
Herbs and trees are soft and lush when they germinate, parched and hard when they die.
For that which is solid and powerful is a part of death, that which is soft and weak is a part of life.
Therefore, if the weapons are powerful, victory is impossible;
A strong tree attracts the notice of the woodcutters.
Strength and power lie below; weakness and softness stand above.¹

In all of the world nothing is more pliant than water.
And yet it has no equal in resiliency against that which is hard.
It cannot be changed by anything.
That which is weak conquers that which is strong; that which is soft conquers that which is hard,

The entire world knows this, but no one can act accordingly.²

In guiding mankind, in service to Heaven,
 There is nothing better than limitation.
 For only limitation leads to early submission.
 Through early submission, great stores of potential can be accumulated,
 By acquiring great stores of potential, man is equal to every situation.
 If man is equal to every situation, he knows no bounds.
 If no one knows our limits, we can take possession of the empire.
 He who controls the productive forces of the empire can endure.
 This is the deep root and solid foundation,
 the natural law of eternal existence and infinite contemplation.³

These passages illustrate, better than any description I could give, the transition from the Taoist doctrine of the contemplation of nature and the understanding of general underlying principles, to a political application of these ideas. As I have already shown, Confucius and his followers based their efforts to restore social order on the view that individual members of society no longer conducted their lives in accordance with the positions assigned to them by the feudal hierarchy. But it was the establishment of this hierarchy and the assignment of positions itself that Taoists considered the cause of all misfortune and decadence. Confucian virtues such as "benevolence" (jen) and "righteousness" (i) were explicitly condemned as inadmissible instruments of bureaucratic intervention in the natural harmony of human relations. One of the most vivid and expressive documents of this opposition to Confucian doctrine is an ironic passage in the *Chuang-tzu*, a work by the early Taoist philosopher Chuang Chou (369-286 B.C.), who blames the ancient "bringers of culture," so revered by Confucians, for the current deplorable state of society:

Huang-ti began to confuse the mind of man with "benevolence" and "righteousness." In their great exertions to satisfy the physical needs of man, Yao and Shun scraped away the hair from their legs. They attempted to achieve benevolence and righteousness within themselves; they expended their spirits, in order to mark out law and measure, and still they did not accomplish their objectives.... When the age of the historical dynasties dawned, the world was in for a real shock . . . the uniform share that all men had in the great potential was destroyed, and the natural order of things burned and sank.... The world loved [Confucian] wisdom and became insatiable in its desires. The executioner's ax and saw carried out their task. Death was dealt out according to guidelines. Men proceeded with hammer and chisel and the world was torn asunder and driven into extreme disorder. All this came to pass because the mind of man had been confounded. For this reason the sages today crawl into the caves of the sacred mountains and the princes in their palaces tremble with fear. The corpses of the executed lie about in great numbers; the chained and bound crowd [the streets], and when someone is sentenced to flogging, he must first watch and wait his turn. And the Confucians and Moists stand on their toes and wave their arms among the hordes in chains and bonds. Oh, what an enormous affront to mankind! Oh, why have they not recognized that all this sacredness and wisdom caused these chains and that all the benevolence and righteousness created these bonds!⁴

The political attitudes underlying these comments brought the Taoists into a glaring contrast not only with the Confucians but also with representatives of the prevailing feudal system. One can often read that the mere existence of such a social form rests only on pillage and exploitation. One example, in the words of Chuang Chou, argues: "If someone steals a hair clasp, he is executed. If someone steals an empire, he becomes prince!"⁵

These views resulted in the suggestion for a solution to the social crisis of these centuries offered by the early Taoists of the waning Chou period. They advocated the return to a primitive, collective

community, without private property or social stratification.⁶ They rejected the form of human coexistence that we designate with the modern term society, that is, a form of organization which—unlike the primitive cultural categories of hunter and forager, as well as of farmer and livestock breeder—is characterized by regular contact with strangers. The long-term, regulated inclusion of strangers into a community, and thus the formation of a society, is only possible if neutral and authoritarian powers are created at the same time, which all participants view with equal confidence.⁷ This cultural advance, in turn, is unthinkable without the simultaneous codification of norms that regulate the contact among strangers; formal institutions supplement and gradually replace the informal organization of members of the community who both know one another and are mutually dependent, based on the bonds that have developed over time. The writings of the early Taoists seem to indicate that they felt this "society" could be reversed and that the feudalistic society of a large empire could return to numerous small communities, which maintained neither hostile, nor peaceful and commercial relations among themselves. It was only in this manner that the element of the stranger, with its accompanying consequences for social organization, could be eliminated. Lao-tzu wrote:

Let there be a small land with few inhabitants: even if there were inventions that would reduce the amount of labor tenfold or one-hundredfold, the people would not use them; the people would die twice before they would depart from this place. Perhaps there would be boats and wagons, but no one would travel in them; perhaps there would be weapons, but no one would practice with them. There would be no writing, except for knots in a rope; the people would be satisfied with their food, content with their clothing, happy with their shelter, and would take delight in their [simple] customs. The closest settlement might be so near that one could hear the roosters crow and the dogs bark, but the people would grow old and die without having gone there.⁸

4.2. EARLY TAOISM AND THE QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Lao-tzu and Chuang Chou, who recorded such thoughts at approximately the same time, assumed that the form of human life they portrayed had at one time actually existed in the past. Not only did they recognize the implications that a communal organization had for the regulation of political conditions, but they also expressed their understanding of the consequences of simple life for the existence and well-being of the individual. Chuang Chou introduced the term *chen-jen*, the "true man," to designate the sages who in antiquity had been able to live under these conditions in complete harmony with the *tao*. Important for this discussion is the attitude attributed to the true man toward the question of illness and death. Chuang Chou considered one of the fundamental attributes of the true man to be the recognition that the human form was no more and no less than a temporary manifestation of an existence undergoing continual transformation. The physical form of this existence emerged from a non-corporeal period and eventually returned to this form until the unfathomable creator bestowed upon it a new, and not necessarily human, form. The true man, who had comprehended this situation, therefore stood above the fears surrounding life and death that motivated decadent men.

To recognize the ways of nature, and to understand how they must relate to the actions of man: that is the goal. Understanding the ways of nature is brought about by nature itself, and the understanding of the [natural] action of man is attained by recognizing that which is knowable, and thankfully enjoying that which is inaccessible to man. To complete the years of life and not suffer an early death half-way along: these are the fruits of knowledge....

What is meant by "the true man"? . . . The true men of antiquity did not dream while sleeping and experienced no fear upon awakening. Their meals were simple, their breathing deep . . . The true men of the [ancient] past knew no strong desire for life and no aversion to dying. Their appearance [in the physical world] brought them no joy, their return [to the world of formless existence] was accompanied by no resistance. They departed in serenity, they arrived with tranquility. They neither forgot their origins, nor pursued their end; they accepted their fate and were pleased with it; and unmindful [of death], they returned [to the world beyond]....

Life and death are destiny; that they are as eternal as day and night is due to the nature of things; that there are limits that man cannot exceed, is due to the general conditions that determine the existence of all creatures....⁹

Four men spoke to one another: "He who is able to transform non-action into a head, life into a body, and death into a tail, and has understood that death and life form a single body, shall be our friend." The four looked at each other, laughed, and were friends from that day on. After a while, one of them—Tzu-yü—fell ill, and another—Tzu-ssu—came to visit him. "Truly, the Creator is great," said the sick man, "see what he has done to me. My back is so crooked that my bowels lie all the way up, my cheeks are at the same level as my navel, my shoulders are higher than my neck, and my hair grows away from Heaven. The natural course of all my bodily functions has been disrupted. And yet I still possess my mental equilibrium." He then dragged himself to a well in which he could view his reflection and called out: "Oh, that the Creator has injured me in this way!" "Are you afraid?" asked Tzu-ssu. "No," replied Tzu-yü, "what is there to fear? I shall soon be released. My left shoulder shall become a cock that will announce the dawn, my right shoulder a crossbow with which I can hunt ducks. My behind will serve as a pair of wheels, and with my soul as a horse before me, I shall travel in my own wagon. Why should I need other vehicles? I received life because it was my time, and I now depart from it in accordance with the same law. Content with the natural course of these events, I am affected by neither joy nor grief. I am simply suspended, as it was said in antiquity, in mid-air, unable to free myself, bound by the web of all things. But all things have been subject to heaven [for all eternity]—why should I fear [a return to the Creator]?" After a while, another of the four—Tzu-lai—fell ill, and lay, fighting for breath, while his family stood crying around him. Tzu-li, the fourth friend, came to visit him. "Leave, begone!" he cried to wife and children. "You are hindering his release!" Then he said, casually leaning against the door, to his friend: "Truly, the Creator is great! I should like to know what he intends to do with you, where he will send you. Do you think he will make of you a rat liver or a snake shoulder?" "A good son must go where his parents send him," replied Tzu-lai. "And Yin and Yang are the parents of man. If they make known to me that it is time for me to die, and I resist, it means only that I am impious—how could I reproach them for that? . . . When it is time, I shall fall asleep, and when the time comes, I shall awaken again."¹⁰

4.3. THE INFLUENCE OF TAOISM ON THE HUANG-TI NEI-CHING

Chuang Chou found efforts to prolong the physical form of existence beyond the time allotted by the Creator just as ridiculous as the grief surrounding the departure from one form of existence into another. He compared the breathing techniques practiced by some of his contemporaries to other arrogant measures of false "sages."¹¹ But the reference in the first of the two passages cited above, in which the true man, based on his understanding of the course of all things, is accorded the possibility of "completing the full measure of his life, and not dying prematurely half-way" cannot be ignored. This notion of a firmly allotted life-time, which the ancient sages were able to utilize fully (while men of the present are summoned halfway to the goal) and references to a simple, communal form of organization in antiquity based upon the natural course of things, are recorded in a therapeutic context in several chapters of what is probably the most renowned work of traditional Chinese medicine, the Huang-ti nei-ching (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic). The literal quotation from the writing of Chuang Chou, as well as inclusion of the concept of the true man (chen-jen), indicates the close intellectual connection of these chapters with early philosophical/political Taoism. A further manifestation of this relationship is the form that the entire work takes—a dialogue between the

legendary Yellow Emperor Huang-ti, a personality probably included for the first time in the mythical succession of prehistorical rulers by the early Taoists,¹² and several of his advisers and ministers. The first chapter of the surviving version of the Su-wen (Pure Questions) section of the Huang-ti nei-ching refers to the one hundred years that men in antiquity were able to live with full possession of physical and mental faculties, while fifty years was the norm for old age in the present (see appendix 2.1). In addition, we read of the seven times seven years allotted to the female life cycle and the eight times eight years allotted to the male life cycle. Nevertheless, this significant work cannot be viewed in its entirety simply as a Taoistic text. The Huang-ti nei-ching is also, in fact, the literary expression of the medicine of systematic correspondence that we discussed in conjunction with Confucianism. If we look more closely at the numerous chapters of this work, keeping in mind the conceptual symbolism of the medical notions of the cause, nature, treatment, and prevention of illness, we discover once again that the Huang-ti nei-ching constitutes a rather heterogeneous compendium of diverse systems of ideas. The above-mentioned comments in the first chapter of the Su-wen ("Shang-ku t'ien-chen lun"), which reflect early Taoist conceptions, represent a striking contrast to thoughts recorded, for instance, in the section "Ling-lan mi-tien lun," which provide an allegorical description of detailed administrative structures (ruler, minister, general, official) and organizational forms of state economy (storage facilities, centers of consumption, smelters, transportation canals, construction, and defense). In addition to these ideologically rather transparent deliberations, oriented on either early Taoist ideals and attitudes or Ch'in and early Han structures, numerous sections are devoted solely to a discussion of systematic correspondences. But these, too, are not totally value-free. Let us recall Lao-tzu's ideal of the measures he would adopt, should he ever be in control of a state. The restriction of activities, especially of commerce, between the individual communities, is simply incompatible with the medical conceptions in the Huang-ti nei-ching, in which the organism consists of centers of consumption and storage facilities, connected by a complicated system of transportation channels that support a lively exchange of materials absorbed from the outside and produced internally.

The Huang-ti nei-ching may thus be seen as reflecting various and quite different ideological currents. While the fundamental medical conceptions in most of the text appear to be related to the social and economic structures of the empire and the Legalist and Confucian ideals and values discussed in the previous chapter, significant traces of early Taoism are also evident in several sections of that scripture. In fact, the recent awareness, stimulated by evidence excavated from the Ma-wang-tui tombs, of a distinct Huang-Lao political philosophy may also improve our understanding of the socio-political affiliation of some of the thoughts expressed in the Huang-ti nei-ching.¹³ To quote Tu Wei-ming:

the tripartite division of Chinese thought prior to the age of Buddhist influence into Legalism, Taoism, and Confucianism may have been a convenient device in traditional Chinese historiography. But this simple image of neatly differentiated systems of ideas lacks explanatory value in analyzing the complex process of empire building in the first century of imperial China.¹⁴

Similarly, the contents of the Huang-ti nei-ching—which were conceptualized and compiled at the same time—should not simply be assigned, in a mutually exclusive manner, to Legalist, Taoist, or

Confucian ideas. Just as "we may speculate that the union of two originally separate traditions of thought (i.e., Taoism and Legalism) was occasioned by the urgent task of empire building in the transitional period between Ch'in and Han,"¹⁵ we may also assume that similar fusions of hitherto unrelated concepts were attempted to improve understanding and management of the individual organism, that is, in medicine. The Huang-ti nei-ching texts reflect these tendencies faithfully.

4.4. TAOIST MACROBIOTICS AND THE LIBERATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The pronounced aversion of Chuang Chou to the apparently widespread techniques of prolonging physical life had scarcely any influence on the subsequent development of Taoism during the Ch'in and Han periods. The intellectual triumph over physical death through a belief in two forms of a single existence was displaced by intensive efforts aimed at avoiding, for an indefinite period, the demise of the material body. The goal of immortality for the physical form of existence thus marked the abandonment of belief in the continual, inexorable process of transformation that underlies the human form of existence. Taoist adepts, who strove to attain immortality, or at least, longevity, in a variety of ways, were thus concerned only with the existential problems of the individual; for the time being, they provided no theoretical impulses for a reorganization of collective existence. This change may have been the cause or the result of the largely insignificant influence Taoism exerted on the political organization of a unified China.

An early philosophical foundation for the new, individualistic objectives of late Taoism during the Han period is contained in the fragmentary work of Yang Chu, who lived during the fourth century B.C. Unlike Chuang Chou, Yang Chu acknowledged death as a final boundary beyond which only the "moldering bones" of man remained:

One man dies at the age of ten, another at the age of one hundred. Perfect saints die, dangerous fools succumb. During life, they were sacred kings like Yao and Shun, after death merely moldering bones. In life they were monsters like the tyrants Chieh and Chou, after death merely decaying bones. As moldering bones, all men are equal; who can differentiate here? Let us therefore seize the moment of life—why concern ourselves with the time after death?¹⁶

An intensification of happiness during physical existence (for Yang Chu the only possibility) was still based on a belief in a fixed allotment of one hundred years maximum for a lifetime, but the text clearly foresees the ardor with which Taoist practitioners of the Han period clung to earthly life and sought to extend it indefinitely, or at least sought to live their available time with the greatest possible vigor. Older shamanistic notions of feathered men, able to ascend into the air, now merged with the doctrine of the desirable harmony of individual life with the macrocosmic laws, resulting in the concept of the "immortal" (hsien), who was able to control the transformation of his being into elementary "matter" to such a degree that he ascended to the gods in a mist or on clouds, assuming his place in the celestial community. The notion of these "celestial immortals" (t'ien-hsien) was supplemented by the concept of "terrestrial immortals" (ti-hsien), who had little desire to exchange the pleasures of an enduring, free, earthly life for some dubious order in the world beyond.¹⁷

The arduous and sacrifice-filled search for the correct methods to achieve immortality led in various directions. One impulse was provided by the basic elements, which according to early Chinese thought constituted the foundation of all material existence. The belief that physical life was

determined by certain "influences of finest matter" (ching-ch'i) led to the development of certain techniques designed to absorb these influences in the degree required to prolong material existence. It is in this connection that breathing techniques can be viewed, whose macrobiotic conceptualization is already evident in a document dating from the sixth century B.C.¹⁸ The Huai-nan tzu derives the following statement from yinyang dualism: "The finest matter influences emanating from fire form the sun. The finest matter influences emanating from water form the moon."¹⁹ In accordance with this concept, men (yang) subjected their bodies to the effects of the sun (yang); women (yin) subjected their bodies to the influences of the moon (yin). Gymnastic techniques (tao-yin) were intended to ensure that the circulation of these influences and their assimilation through the skin remained free from all disturbances.

Another concept within the same current proposes that water is the actual basic element of physical existence. The most visible proof for this assumption may have been seen in the consistency of male semen (also ching—i.e., "essence" or "finest matter" of water), whose role in reproduction was apparently known. The Kuan-tzu, a work from the late Chou or early Han period, contains the following remarks:

Human beings are made of water. The [seminal] essence of the man, and the influences of the woman unite, and water flows, forming a new shape.²⁰
The essence of water is thick, viscous and congealed. It confers continuity of living, and not death. Why do we call water the preparative element? Because the myriad things get their life from it. So those who know on what water depends can know the true way in which water is preparatory to all things. People ask what water is. It is the origin of all things, and the ancestral temple of all Life. water produces the beautiful and the ugly, the virtuous and the wicked, the foolish and the clever.²¹
Thus if water collects in the form of jade, the nine virtues of jade appear. If water congeals to form human beings, the nine orifices and five depots appear. These are [part of its] essence. Such essence, being thick and viscous, can continue living and not die.²²

The notion of the "essence" of water congealing or solidifying first into jade and then into man in an ongoing vital process un-interrupted by death or conclusion indicates an early, purely naturalistic interpretation of Chuang Chou's ideas of the continuity of existence. It is obvious that these views were not based on a concept of energetics, but rather on the characteristically Chinese notion of matter refined to the point of formlessness, which, when it congeals or solidifies again, can assume any form. Out of these beliefs arose the conviction that the life of a man could be prolonged indefinitely through the greatest possible production of semen, which was then to be retained in the organism. This objective, in conjunction with the incorporation of sexual life into seasonal and daily rhythms as well as into the context of other cosmic factors, constitutes the substance of Taoist sexual techniques. They also served, as did all other techniques of longevity, for the treatment of illness, and detailed instructions concerning positions, frequency, and intensity of therapeutic sexual encounters were developed.²³ In this system, women were generally assigned the sole role of a necessary supplier of the second component requisite for the formation of life, that is, the yin influences, which they produced during sexual intercourse. Accordingly, instructions dealing with longevity advised men to have relationships with as many women as possible in succession at carefully calculated favorable times. In the process, the goal was to prevent the male orgasm as long as possible, assimilating instead the yin influences of the female partner.

4.5. THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC DRUG THERAPY

A second fundamental approach to achieving immortality rested on supplying the body with substances which were, according to some sort of evidence, effective in this regard. This approach is far more significant for the development of healing in China than the techniques discussed in the preceding section. Here, too, two currents must be distinguished. The first of these found expression in the view that certain substances or precious metals contained the materialized principle of immortality. In the case of gold, for example, a recognition of its "incorruptibility" and permanence may have merged with macrobiotic considerations, for gold was yellow, and thus assigned to the earth and the center. Another substance that attracted early attention was mercuric sulfide (cinnabar), which in its pure form—due to its insolubility—is the sole nontoxic mercury compound. Efforts to produce gold artificially, as well as the preparation of other substances promising immortality, may have made China the birthplace of alchemy.²⁴ Some of the drugs subsequently developed in Chinese medicine resulted from the experiments with minerals by Taoist adepts and from the doctrine of transformations and abrupt changes to which these substances could be subjected.

The second current involved with supplying life-prolonging substances to the body was concerned with plants and, consequently, with a search for the "herb of immortality" (pu-szu chih ts'ao). The use of plants and other natural substances to cure illnesses is well documented in sources of the latter half of the first millennium B.C. I have suggested elsewhere, based on an analysis of the pharmaceutical contents of the prescription manual Wu-shih-erh ping fang from the Ma-wang-tui grave of 168 B.C., that Chinese materia medica emerged from two different origins.²⁵ One of these appears to have consisted in attempts to treat external affliction, that is, wounds, lesions, or burns, by an external application of natural substances. The second origin of Chinese materia medica may have consisted in experiences with the oral ingestion of plant, animal, or mineral substances, whatever the actual reasons for their consumption may have been. The imaginative impulse that caused practitioners of longevity to turn their attention to the plant world, though, may have originated from reports, transmitted to China sometime during the fourth or third centuries B.C. from Indian culture, of a plant that when ingested resulted in immortality, enabled contacts with the gods, and even raised the dead. Only the unexpected appearance of fantastic supporting evidence from a foreign civilization can explain the sudden, intensive efforts of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, China's first emperor, to obtain this extremely promising plant. Apparently these reports, as first Wasson and then Needham have convincingly demonstrated, concerned the soma, toadstool, which played such an important role in early Indian religion.²⁶ The receptive Chinese were never able to view the actual object of these reports. Under mysterious circumstances, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti was sent by his advisers into the mountains to find the herb chih, which no one had ever seen. When these efforts produced no tangible result, the emperor heeded the strange requests of a man named Hsü Fu, sending him with a large number of virginal boys and girls on a sea voyage to bring back the coveted substance from a distant land of immortals in the East. Following the purported return and second, better-equipped journey, nothing more was ever heard of the enterprise.²⁷ Such efforts died down somewhat

following the upheavals accompanying the fall of the Ch'in and the founding of the Han dynasty, and Emperor Wu was the first to have ample opportunity to heed similar advice; he opened his court to numerous established magicians (wu) and more recent "prescription scholars" (fang-shih),²⁸ who also exerted considerable influence. All of these groups can be roughly classified under the ideologically all-encompassing concept of Taoism.

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a man died whose open-mindedness toward the observance and investigation of nature assured him a permanent place in the early history of Chinese science. Liu An (179-122 B.C.), also known as Huai-nan tzu, was the son of a prince and himself a Taoist-oriented philosopher. He surrounded himself with a large circle of naturalists who devoted themselves to the multivarious activities that promised longevity. Because of his great desire for education, unusual for his social status, orthodox Confucians called Liu An "knowledgeable in heterodox (hsieh) doctrines."²⁹ A work entitled Huai-nan tzu, whose authors are to be found among Liu's followers, contains the first incorporation of Chinese medicinal herbs into a therapeutic tradition and, at the same time, the inevitable mythicizing of their origin in the initial deeds of a prehistoric cultural hero. One passage reads as follows:

In ancient times the people subsisted on herbs and drank water. They collected the fruits from the trees and ate the flesh of the clams. They frequently suffered from illnesses and poisonings. Then Shen-nung taught the people for the first time to sow the five kinds of grain, to observe whether the land was dry or moist, fertile or stony, whether the land lay high or low. He tried the tastes of all herbs and [investigated] the water sources to see if they were sweet or bitter. In this way he taught the people what they should avoid and where they could seek help. At that time [Shen-nung] found on a single day 70 [herbs, waters, etc.] that were medically effective.³⁰

Shen-nung, the "Divine Husbandman," is a legendary personality, hailed by a rather significant philosophical school, the Agrarian school (nung-chia), as late as the second century B.C.³¹ It is possible that Shen-nung was first elevated to this rank by the Taoists; at any rate, he is also known under the designation Yen-ti, the Fire Emperor. The bibliographical section of the official history of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 8) already included the title Shen-nung Huang-ti shih-chin (literally "The Interdictions of Shen-nung and Huang-ti concerning Food"), an apparent dietetic manual. The actual work, however, has been lost. Several centuries later, during the Chin period (A.D. 265-420), several surviving medical and Taoist texts mention a "Classic of Shen-nung" (Shen-nung ching), possibly the same "Shen-nung's Classic on Drugs" (Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching) first designated with certainty in the literature registry of the Sui (589-618) and T'ang (618-906) dynasties. The identification of Shen-nung as the founder of drug knowledge is thus reflected in the title of the original work of Chinese pharmaceutical literature, whose first authentic compilation was prepared by the renowned Taoist naturalist T'ao Hung-ching (452-536). In the centuries following Liu An, and even beyond Tao Hung-ching, interest in the further development of drug knowledge, as well as in the writings on drugs, is promoted primarily by Taoist-motivated persons, who at times belonged to the highest levels of government, including the emperor. The reserve of the Confucians toward this branch of knowledge is easily explained by the frequently cited aversion of this group, on the one hand, to manual labor, for drug therapy also encompassed knowledge regarding the collection and preparation of plant, animal, and mineral substances and, on the other hand, to the entire study of

nature. But, in addition, a totally different reason may have formed the basis of the Confucian aversion to drug therapy.

Confucianism advocated the strict classification of each individual member of society into a rigid and normative social structure, and the Confucian world view linked the preservation of individual health with adherence to certain socio-politically motivated codes of conduct. In opposition to this view, the Taoists strove for a liberation of the individual from such social obligations. Drug therapy, which promised each individual good health and possible longevity without aging, independent of adherence to social norms, must have seemed to them a much more attractive field of study than it did to their ideological opponents. An attempt to expand the medical theories of the medicine of systematic correspondences, which at first had no connection with pharmaceuticals, to the use of drugs, was therefore made only at a time, during the eleventh century, when Confucianism and Taoism had temporarily come closer conceptually, at least on a restricted level. I will return to this development, which became known as Chin-Yüan medicine and which was closely associated with the rise of so-called Neo-Confucianism, at a later point.

The pharmaceutical tradition of the Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching and subsequent works reveals, in comparison with the medico-theoretical tradition of the Huang-ti nei-ching, certain characteristic differences, which once again demonstrate that these two fields of knowledge cannot simply be subsumed under the general heading of Taoism. The most striking indication of a conceptual dichotomy is already evident in the fact that drug knowledge, during the first millennium, remained almost completely unaffected by theories of systematic correspondence. The Shen-nung pen-ts'ao does contain a reference to a sort of primitive categorizing such that all drugs can be differentiated according to whether they belong to yin or yang, but beyond that, there is no integration of, for instance, the effects of drugs into notions of systematic correspondence regarding the physiology of the organism. With the exception of a single description of a medicinal plant, the Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching lacks any consideration of the doctrine of the Five Phases. Only the five varieties of the imaginary plant chih, the herb of immortality which Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had unsuccessfully sought, was placed in this theoretical framework.

A second significant deviation of this tradition of drug therapy from the medicine of systematic correspondences lies in the antithetical classification of drug effects into hierarchical positions that were borrowed from human society. In the Huang-ti nei-ching, those drugs in a prescription that are supposed to develop the actual active therapeutic effect are defined as "rulers" (chün). In addition, there are "minister" (ch'en), "assistant" (tso), and "aide" (shih) drugs, which were assigned only supporting roles. In contrast, the Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching divided all drugs into three groups. The first and most important group was assigned the task of prolonging life, that is, the transformation of the body into the immortal condition of ethereal matter. These drugs are designated "rulers" (chün) in the Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching; they do not contain any "poison," or—as we should translate in a technical context—"medicinal effectivity." The third and lowest class of drugs was associated with the function of combating acute illness; drugs in this category were termed "assistants" (tso) and "aides" (shih). The symbolic identification of drugs responsible for combating acute illness in one case as "rulers" and in another as "assistants" and "aides" indicates two opposing socio-political

assumptions. Symbolically, illness in the individual corresponds to a crisis in society. The Huang-ti nei-ching reflects a world view that considered the most important task of the ruler to be to find solutions to such social crises; subordinate ministers, assistants, and aides supported the ruler in this function. In contrast, the true ruler envisioned in the Shen-nung pen-ts'ao ching is not concerned with authoritarian intervention in the lives of the people in order to eliminate such social crises, but rather strives to bring harmony into the entire system: he does not initiate "poisonous influences on the lives of men," that is, punishment and other legal measures for direct elimination of acute crises. The difference between Confucian and Taoist social theory articulated in these two symbolic terminologies represents a further subtle parallel in therapeutic concepts.

In concluding, we should recall that Taoism supported, over two thousand years of Chinese history, two major therapeutic tendencies, namely demonic medicine and pragmatic materia medica. The notions underlying the belief in the illness-causing nature of demons and in the illness-preventing and curative properties of drugs all contradicted, as I have pointed out repeatedly in the preceding chapters, the assumption that only a life-style in accordance with a specific moral could guarantee health. As shall be demonstrated in the following chapter, though, the multifaceted nature of Taoism harbored yet another therapeutic approach that stood in marked contrast to the two tendencies just mentioned. The rise of a Taoist "church," and its temporal acquisition of actual political power, brought forth a system of health care that shared a fundamental aspect with the medicine of systematic correspondence, that is, its close links with a specific set of moral norms.

Unschuld's Footnotes (from Unschuld, 1985, p. 375).

1. Tao-te ching, chap. 76.
2. Ibid., chap. 78.
3. Ibid., chap. 59.
4. Wilhelm 1940, p. 76, translation modified.
5. Ibid., p. 70.
6. Needham 1956, pp. 100f.
7. Stinchcombe 1965.
8. Tao-te ching, chap. 80; Bauer 1976, p. 34, translation modified.
9. Wilhelm 1940, pp. 46-48, translation modified.
10. Bauer 1976, p. 39.
11. Wilhelm 1940, p. 116.
12. Eichhorn 1973, p. 105.
13. Cf. Chou I-mou 1980 and Kuo Ping-ch'üan and I Fa-yin 1980.
14. Tu Wei-ming 1979, p. 108.
15. Ibid.
16. Bauer 1976, p. 46.
17. Ibid., pp. 100-109.
18. Wilhelm 1948, as quoted by Needham 1956, pp. 143-144.
19. Huai-nan-tzu chu, 1968, p. 35.

20. Needham 1956, p. 43.
21. Ibid., p. 44.
22. Ibid., p. 43-44.
23. Ishimpo, 1955, pp. 633f.; Ishihara and Levy 1968.
24. Needham 1974, pp. 71-76.
25. Cf. P. Unschuld 1982a, pp. 60-61.
26. Needham 1974, pp. 114f.; Wasson 1968.
27. Bauer 1976, pp. 64-65.
28. Eichhorn 1973, pp. 117-118.
29. Needham 1961, p. 111.
30. Huai-nan-tzu chu, 1968, p. 331; P. Unschuld 1975, p. 177; the following outline of the early history of drug therapy in China is repeated in greater detail in *Medicine of China: A History of Pharmaceutics*.
31. Bauer 1976, pp. 25-26.