III. WESTERN INFLUENCES AND THEIR USES
In Chinese art, representations of the body are rare and discreet.¹ The body of the subjects is unobtrusive, covered by costumes whose drapery and movement suggest personality portrayed in a dynamic state, animated by breath rather than by muscle and bone. Outside the domain of art, the few visual representations of the body which have survived come mainly from four sources: Taoism; the art of divination by examination of the body; traditional medicine; and forensic medicine. Each of these specialties concentrated on a particular aspect of the body. Taoism developed a system of symbolic description in the form of a spatio-temporal field of mutations and connections with the exterior.² The outline of the body is blurred and the internal elements, which are rarely illustrated, are represented by written descriptions of, for example, the organs and their corresponding divinities, or using metaphorical imagery such as the tiger and the dragon to symbolize the liver and the lungs, or by symbolic figuration. The study of physiognomy concentrates on topographical description of different areas of the body, on certain bones and their relationship with events in social life: the most frequently illustrated was the head and more particularly the face, seen as a microcosm in itself and a mirror of all internal and external phenomena. This attention to the features greatly influenced portrait painting in China, and it was often not limited only to the face of the subject. In medicine, descriptions and representations did not go much beyond a study of the viscera and the circulation of the humours and energies along the meridians (see Fig. 1). These few representations are summary in that they often omit the limbs, even the head, and simply show an oval contour enclosing the organs. Even the introduction into China of notions of