CONDITIONS, WAYS AND MEANS OF HEALING IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHINESE TAOIST

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Chinese literature reveals an astonishing proliferation of notions pertaining to healing and medical help. However the medical doctor or physician does not always appear to be the main actor. The good effects of healing may well come about without proper physicians being called in to see the patient. Buddhist monks and Taoists, whom we think of as religious specialists, seem to perform effectively medical skills. On the other hand we hardly get information about any medical training which they might have received. The relationship between these religious specialists and the medical profession is worthwhile studying.

We want to concentrate our study on the sphere of Taoism.

Taoist literary collections contain many books on alchemical matters, also pertaining to the sphere of medicine, which convey the impression that religious elements uniquely contribute to make these practical matters work. Talismans (fu) would be such an element. A reknown book of this type is Ko Hung's (283-347 A.D.) *Pao-p'u tsu, nei-p'ien*. The Taoist Canon abounds with texts which feature the production of elixirs and methods of prolonging human life. In the course of history two types of alchemy developed, the operational and the internal alchemy, which to some degree use similar terminologies. In the field of internal alchemy the human body itself turns out to be

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1 "talismans" (fu) are contracts with spiritual potencies, see e.g. *Pao-p'u tsu nei-p'ien* 17.8a-18b (*Ju-shan fu*) (SPPY). Mountains are the places where effective drugs and ingredients may be revealed to the worthy. Also see F.C. Reiter, "The scripture of the hidden contracts (Yin-fu ching), a short survey on facts and findings", in: NOAG 136.78, 82/note 24. Also see W. Eichhorn, *Die Religionen Chinas*, 141 (T'ai-chieh liu-fu ching), (Stuttgart 1973).

2 See J.R. Ware transl., *Alchemy, medicine, religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tsu)*, (Massachusetts 1966).

3 See N. Sivin, "The theoretical background of elixir alchemy", in: J. Needham ed., *Science and civilisation in China*, vol. 4, 210-323 (Cambridge 1980). Operational and internal alchemy sometimes appear explicitly as complementary. We also notice that the name Ko Hung lingers on throughout alchemical tracts, see e.g. TT 950 *Shang-tung hsin-tan ching chüeh*. The "Shang-tung scriptures and instructions about the mind and the elixirs" contain statements concerning the internal and the operational alchemy which complement each other. The text which may have been written during the Sui period (581-618) presents alchemical prescriptions, techniques and rules which show many parallels to *Pao-p'u tsu, Chin-tan* 3.3b. Also see TT 934 *T'ai-po ching* (T'ang,
the laboratory within which the "new body" is formed. Taoism is preoccupied with human life and its quality, and this naturally connects it with the art of long life. Consequently we say that the Taoist attitude concerning human nature predestines Taoists to operate in the medical vocation.

Some western publications on Chinese medicine and Taoism present the "Chart of the Interior Scenery" (Nei-ching t'u)\(^4\). This chart professes to depict the "landscape", which inside the human body becomes perceptible for the visionary, who indulges in appropriate practices of meditation. The spiritual and energetic potencies within the human body become visible entities. This internal microcosm and all its constituents somehow correspond with the outside macrocosm.

Again, on this basis there is an obvious and close connection between Taoism and Chinese medicine, and this suggests to analyse their terminologies as if they had the same theoretic and practical basis. At first sight such a comprehensive treatment seems to be suitable. Indeed, quite a few medical, alchemical and physiological texts were done by Taoists\(^5\). But what does this mean? We suspect that such a comprehensive approach proceeds much too fast. Possibly we neglect some specific implications of the healing practices of Taoists, which may have nothing to do with medicine proper except the effects\(^6\). For this reason we refer to historic documentations, in order to characterize Taoists and their potential to perform as healers. First of all we have to pin down who officially practiced as physician and thus was labelled "physician".

In China as anywhere else, a popular medical knowledge was widespread. We even may say that medical knowledge was mandatory. The common understanding of human society and human relations was based on the concepts of jen, tz'u and hsiao ("humanity", "compassion" and "filial piety"). These concepts generally demanded the exertion of medical help, e.g. vis-à-vis

\(^{618-907}\), which speaks significantly about ten sorts of people who may receive instructions about the Gold Elixir, and those who may not. Although operational alchemy seems not to be excluded, the text heavily refers to I-ching correspondences and concepts of internal alchemy. Concerning the Gold Elixir, see also F.C. Reiter, *Grundelemente und Tendenzen des religiösen Taoismus, Das Spannungsverhältnis von Integration und Individualität in seiner Geschichte zur Chin-, Yuan- und frühen Ming-Zeit*, 91-105 (Münchener Ostasiatische Studien vol. 48, Stuttgart 1988).


\(^5\) See above note 2 (J.R. Ware), and note 3 (N. Sivin).

\(^6\) "Medicine" in the sense of a specific vocation which is based on training, skill and public acknowledgement. An important contribution dealing with the results and tendencies of scholarly research in the field of Chinese medicine, is N. Sivin, "Science and medicine in imperial China—the state of the field", in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, 41-90, esp. 65-73; and 73-90 for a comprehensive bibliography (1988).