

TAOISM

An Ancient Chinese Philosophy at the background to the Modern Struggle for the Preservation of the Planet Ecology.

‘Remember Guangzhou, in China,’ said Pierre Marion, suddenly bringing me back to reality. We were now sitting in the dining room of the house. It had been the nave of the *ancienne église*. My wife was beside me.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Well, let us hear Domingo, for once,’ added Marion.

On November 1973, I lectured on cardiac surgery in Guangzhou. A practical and a theory course. Dr. Lo Zhengxian was Chief of Cardiac Surgery at the Guangdong Provincial Hospital and he remained with us all the time. After that (1973) Dr. Lo spent almost a year as a member of the staff of doctors I led at the Italian Hospital in Buenos Aires.

But what struck me at once during that Chinese visit, was the meeting with Tian Shi, the Taoist philosopher and his enormous spiritual personality.

Taoist philosophers nourish their souls with the energy overflowing from the mystery of Nature. The wood sketched in the mist of the Chinese mountain remains the amulet of the philosopher’s soul. He offers it up so that it can live through millenniums concealed in the spirit of the trees.

Tian Shi at the Old Manchu Quarter in Guangzhou

When one of the evening gatherings came to an end I asked the philosopher if he let me go with him to the Manchu Quarter where he lived together with other old men in very poor lodgings.

Thus we left the Qi Shi Inn, the usual place for the meetings of Taoists. On our way to his house I suddenly feared my presence could disturb the philosopher’s meditation.

We walked along narrow, straggling streets; he remained silent and walked very slowly and painfully. I noticed he could hardly bend his

right knee. “This is the consequence of an accident in his childhood”, he told me.

My fears were absolutely unjustified though, Tian Shi was really happy walking by my side and he soon began to talk. He went on talking during our way along the streets.

I know that the Taoist masters of ancient China used to keep a distance from those they considered intruders. They sought after solitude for their deep meditation.

Tian Shi stopped and leaned on a boulder just beside the path towards the Manchu neighborhood.

For a moment I thought he wanted to rest for a while but it was not so. He stretched out his arm and without uttering a word, he pointed at a big half-hidden tree.

The tree seemed dried to me. Its long branches going upwards without a single green touch of leaves. In the dim of the night it appeared to be surrounded by a beam of yellowish light that faded away after a moment. I was overcome as by magic. I thought I was before a mirage, an illusion like a shadow on the plain.

For a moment Tian Shi looked entranced, the mysterious yellowish beam surrounded him too, making a whole of his figure and the dried tree.

After what I felt an eternity, Tian Shi spoke. He said ‘It is not dry, it looks dead but it is not. It has only isolated itself, kept apart from others because it cannot avoid the capture of unforgiving time, *the cosmic clock*. Nature has chained and locked it until the end of time’. I remained silent.

‘I have been looking for it and found it at last’, Tian Shi proceeded. He pointed at a snug half-asleep bird posed on one of the dry branches.

It has not departed, it does not want to leave its home. It wants to show gratitude to its protector, the leafless tree. That motionless bird feels the energy dormant in the innermost part of the tree.

The tree has sunk within itself and it shares the sadness of all the birds that once nested in its leaves and that cannot flood the air with their music.' I remained silent.

'The bird strongly believes in the matriarchal qualities of Spring and it faithfully waits with unmistakable certainty the fulfilling of the natural law. When I saw the bird I instantly knew that the tree was not dead.' Tian Shi paused for a moment.

'Dr. Liotta, when you get back to your home country, let not the western scientific research in you forget the allegory on Life given by this sad bird of the Manchu Quarter.'

'You know Dr. Marion, Tian Shi taught me the greatest lesson on Taoist philosophy. He showed me the chain of determinism of Nature and its inviolability, on one side and man's freedom of thought, on the other.'

The sad bird of Guangzhou could only but wait for this time to come. Such is the mystery of life. Hope never stopped beating in the heart of the sad bird.

A different kind of hope, without the complexities of human hope. Just the voice of nature repeating that certain things will always happen.

The words of Tian Shi were full of wisdom. They have left an indelible mark in my soul, and a deep one in my heart. Those words dealt with the highest problems of Life, Nature and Mankind in a practical straightforward philosophy and that is the secret of Taoism.

Taoism finds a vital orientation to match with nature, in order to catch its energy, and to make it produce what is supernatural¹. Taoism is congruence between man and nature.

¹ Emile Brehier,, "Histoire de la Philosophie" (History of Philosophy) ;The philosophy in the Far West by Paul Masson-Ouriel,Paris,1962.

*Tian Shi ,the unforgettable philosopher, by far the best of greatest Taoist poets.

Very well my old friend, frankly let me tell you within your dramatic humility, I have thought you are the philosopher, you have entered upon *The Secret of the Golden Rose of Life*, and this under title of one of my cherished humanist books I want to dedicate to you.

Tian Shi, dear philosopher, beyond the reality of our modern logic science, there is a world of secret gifts deep-rooted in the innermost life of the human heart. They are slippery and hide out every time we want to grasp them. It is the unfathomable question of life itself; man's metaphysical survival.

'Dr. Marion, I am afraid I may have been tiring you now with my narrative about my friend the Chinese philosopher. On another occasion I will tell you what I learned from Tian Shi at his poor house.'

'Not at all, we must hear them now we shall go on, in the next room,' stated Marion.

He stood up and showed us the way. The chamber was a round one, it had possibly been the Baptistery of the *ancienne église*.

'I will tell you two folk tales, said Tian Shi when we arrived at his poor stay.'

These childish tales are to me the most amazing of the personality of great Chinese philosophers.

***The Hunter Hailibu*" is a Chinese popular tale but its origin is Mongolian.

Hailibu had saved the dragon king's daughter from death and the king gave him a green jade precious stone. A stone with some extraordinary attributes.

When Hailibu received the stone he swore he would never reveal its qualities and that he would always keep the secret.

When the hunter put the stone into his mouth he could instantly understand the language of birds and beasts.

Many years passed and Hailibu was hunting in one of his favorite places in the mountain when he heard some birds singing and chirping away "let us fly somewhere else for the mountain will crumble down and the water will flood all over".

Hailibu returned to his village just at the bottom of the mountain. He had sworn not to betray the secret for if he did so he would be turned in stone. Hailibu wanted his people to be safe and gave away the powers of the jade stone.

There is such a place called "Hailibu stone" on the top of the mountain. The village people placed it there out of gratitude for having been saved from catastrophe. One after another generation still remember the hero.

"The wonderful Bird " is a popular Chinese tale but it is altogether Mongolian too.

There existed such bird in the Northern Mountains. It could speak our language and give advice.

King Yierteeger from the East caught the bird and made it teach him the hard duties of monarchy. The advice and judgement of the bird were deprived of sentimentalism and fetching.

The bird could not take the misery and misfortune of the subjects with mercy. It had to put pity out of the way. It was the deal of the bird with the king if he wanted to keep it.

Lastly, the tale shows us the immense weight those who govern us must carry through and it is this task that inevitably hardens their hearts.

'Doubtless, I became tedious dwelling on the Chinese Taoism,' I expressed.

But I venture to think that Pierre Marion was really prepared to continue the subject.

'Mrs. Marion, we are pleased about the wonderful moment spent with you at your home, but it is getting late and Olga and I should return to Lyon.'

End of the Eve with Dr. Marion in the *ancienne église* of Polimieux sur la Saone nearby Lyon, France.

Extracted from: "Amazing Adventures of a Heart Surgeon", Liotta's International Thesaurus- Chapter 1 and 2

THE CHINESE IDEOGRAMS

The Heart: *The Spiritual Nucleus since the Mists of Time*

Tao literally means *the way* and, apparently, came into being in China in the 6th century BC.

The fundamental doctrines of early Taoism are embodied in a famous book, *Tao te King*, – the *Book of the Way and the Virtue* –, which has been unquestionably attributed to Lao-tzu. However, Lao-tzu seems to be a legend, according to some historians.

The peculiar *excellence* of Lao-tzu teaching is against all formalities and artificialities created by men.

Tao teaches that Excellence is an art got by training. Excellence, thus, is not an act but a habit. Lao-tzu, in this point, preceded Aristotle.

Tao simply follows nature.

The ancient Chinese philosophy is at the root, at the core of the enduring and constant struggles for the preservation of the precious planet's ecology. These fights have engrafted themselves onto the modern world culture.

The most efficient power in this world related to taoism is called *wu-wei*, literally meaning --*no action, no violence*--, the *laissez faire* of modern time when primary government actions are typified.

And here we have the key of Tao's deeper philosophy: The soft and weak always beats the hard and strong.

There is nothing weaker and softer than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things; time is really unimportant.

*Professor Inima², 'Yes please,' this reminds me of the mysterious and apparently long-lasting power of calmer and weaker souls, gifted with deep inspirations and indulged in great ideas.

² Inima in this book is the nickname of Professor Angel J. Battistessa. The reader will become very familiar with the unforgettable Inima during the Philosophy lectures.

And in the life evening we have the feeling that they have reached the holy intellectual fervor and the utmost noblest achievement as human beings.

**Suddenly, it reminds me of my mentor, an unforgettable man and dear friend, the creator of the artificial kidney, Dr Willem J. Kolff.*

Professor Inima continued. 'Tao states *the discursive science destroys the unity of human being and drives men on to confusion*, giving absolute value to relative things, and erring in considering valid problems.'

'Apparently, the *wu wei*, the conception of a pure weakness, is really Tao's function powerful strength. And, the Taoist Saint is always retiring to the no-action (*wu-wei*). And his teaching is without a single word.'

'Again, Tao means the last reality. A simple life is one of plainness in which profit is discarded, cleverness abandoned, selfishness eliminated and desires reduced.

Lao-tzu wants us to maintain steadfast quietude and to be tranquil, enlightened, being in truth the aggregate acts of the will; all-embracing one with nature and in accord with Tao.

Lao-tzu, rejected the Confucianism that emphasizes social order, an active life, the importance of ritual, and great respect to social values and rationalism.

However, Confucianism reinforced charity and Justice, the maximum virtues among men. Confucius is considered the Socrates of China.'

I looked Inima into his eyes, he seemed tired. 'Professor, before you start with the priest-magician and the philosophy of The Yin-Yang School, I want to refer to the noblest curiosity as I did with Professor Angel J. Battistessa; the reader surely remembers the outstanding philologist, my teacher.'

‘Yes, I am well acquainted with your research. Hence, we will be pleased to hear on your findings of Chinese phonemes with the hieroglyphic of the word *heart* incorporated into the written character. The utmost spiritualist connotation is at the root of the whole matter,’ went on Inima.

*Thank you Professor; I started the study on the written Chinese characters in China soil during prolonged scientific missions that took place in 1973, 1975, 1978, and 1990.

During the period 1981-82, Zhang Zhyya, Second Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Buenos Aires, firstly helped me in the interpretation of Chinese characters.

The study of Chinese phonemes (ideograms), in which the word *heart* is incorporated, shows the utmost spiritual connotation. Doubtless I should say similarly or even more fittingly in the comparative studies with Indo-European languages.

The etymology of the words Heart, Cardiac, Cardiology in Indo-European languages is derived from the Latin *Cor* and from the Greek *Kardia*. And in drawing out a deeper picture, which implies the strict study of the word family relation, at the root of the whole matter:

**Cor in Latin, Cardiac in Greek, Crudize in Leton, Ssird in Armenian and heartz, heart, hearte and Hairt in Germanic languages have ingeniously proved their rooted connections to the Sanskrit Hrid, Krid.*

The word Hrid, Krid in Sanskrit means the bounce of the chest, the jumping of the chest that always means life.

Then, I repeat, *krid* or *hrid* in Sanskrit means to jump. That is obviously the heart. Indeed, it is the only organ in the body that jumps.

Also, the Sanskrit words *krid* or *rurd* curiously mean the deer, the animal that is continuously jumping. The observations of the nature are ready-shaped at the early roots in the development of man’s expressive language.

The plain fact is that we are simply here , reaching the key of the deep-rooted origin in philological analyses.

*The discovery of the Aryan Linguistic Community was done by a German philologist, Franz Bopp (1791-1867).

In a famous book published in 1816, Bopp confirmed the original root relations since the mists of time among Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Brahman, and Teutonic tongues.

Through ethnological and philological research it was possible to follow the life of our Aryan ancestors, the Indo-European tribes that were living in the plain of Germany, Hungary, and primarily between the Carpathian and Caucasian mountains.

And, suddenly, in the third millennium BC, one of the greatest restless mobilizations of tribal communities in history commenced. Studious think that was due to deeper climatic changes, maybe the glacial period.

They advanced first to the south and later to the west of the Mediterranean Sea and occupied what is now known as Greece, Italy, Spain, France, and Anatolia.

A second advancing wave of Aryans took place approximately in 1200 BC and reached Iran and the north of India (the Punjab).

The Vedic hymns of India are a compilation directly derived from the Sanskrit, apparently the traced tongue of the primeval natural family of our Aryan ancestors.

*As a matter of fact, the philological analysis of the Sanskrit is the only single way to study the roots of our European ancestors, because the Aryans did not leave any form of written communication.

If we accept the Aryans as a natural family, it evidently does not follow the pattern concerning the various branches which grew into separate races and nations speaking separate although kindred languages.

Some inherent findings of these studies come to little more than the fact that Magyars and Ottomans are alike non-Aryan invaders, who made their way into Europe within recorded times and that both were, rightly or wrongly, called Turks.

In fact, Magyar and Ottoman tongues are Asiatic and, strictly speaking, Mongolia is their starting point.

*In fact, in the study of the written Chinese language, the representations of the graphic phonemes appear as photographs of the ideas (ideograms).

As a matter of fact, the study of the Chinese phonemes, in which the character of the heart is incorporated, shows a strong spiritualist connotation similar to that of the Aryan tongues.

Cor, Cordis, mean heart in Latin and we have **cor-dial**, **con-cord**, **cor-dially**, **cordialness**, **con-cor-dance**, **Cou-rage**, **courageously**, **dis-cou-ragement**, **ran-cor**, **ran-cor-ous**.

Kardiac means *heart* in Greek and we have in Aryan languages, **car-diology**, **cardiac-electro-car-diogram**. **Heart** is coming from teutonic tongues, thus we have the following examples of derivation, **heart-y**, **heart-ening**, **heart-ened**.

*Once incorporated the word *heart* in the Chinese phonemes, we were able to identify more properly 18 hieroglyphs with the highest spiritualist significance when the word *heart* had been introduced in the hieroglyphs, **Figures 1 and 2**³.

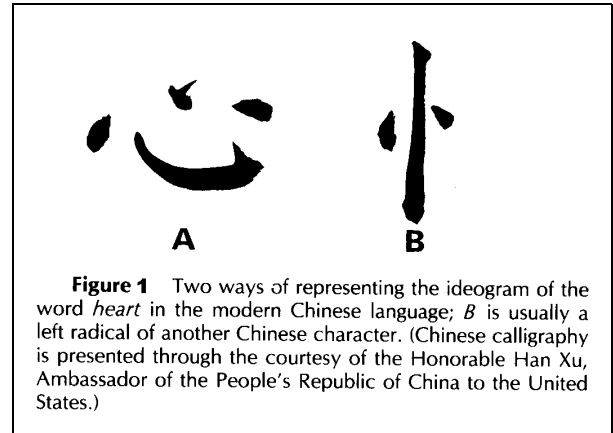


Figure 1 Two ways of representing the ideogram of the word *heart* in the modern Chinese language; *B* is usually a left radical of another Chinese character. (Chinese calligraphy is presented through the courtesy of the Honorable Han Xu, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the United States.)

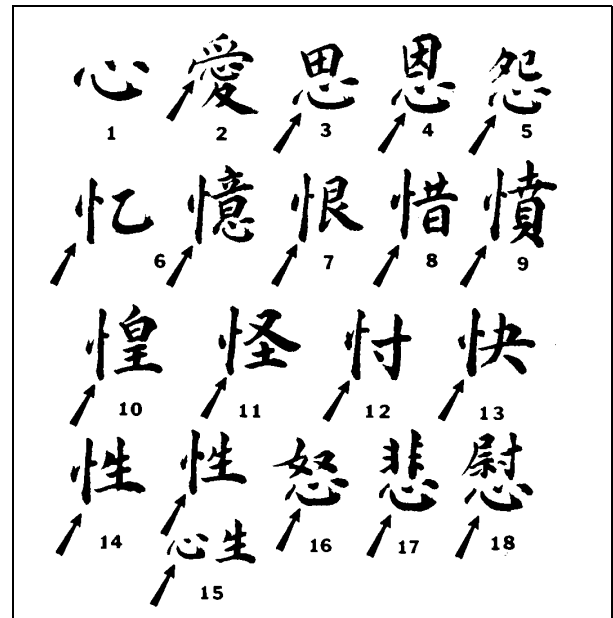


Figure 2 Many phonemes in the Chinese language have strong spiritualistic connotations. Their graphic representation incorporates the word *heart* (phonemes 1 to 18). Arrows indicate the position of the word *heart* in the phonemes. The pronunciation (in italics) and the meaning are as follows: 1, *xin*, heart, feel, center; 2, *ai*, love; 3, *si*, think, recall; 4, *en*, favor, kindness; 5, *yuan*, rancor, hate; 6, *yi*, remember, the left being a simplified version of the right; 7, *hen*, hate; 8, *xi*, hurt, regret, pity; 9, *fen*, irritate, resent, angry; 10, *huang*, alarmed; 11, *guai*, blame, strange; 12, *cun*, reflect, consider; 13, *kuai*, happy, rapid, sharp; 14, *xing*, sex, characteristics; 15, *xing*, heart + birth, heart + life; 16, *nu*, anger; 17, *bei*, sad; 18, *wei*, comfort. Numbers 14 and 15 are highly interesting; note how the ideas of sex and characteristics (*xing*) are integrated into birth and life (*sheng*), the right radical in number 15. (Chinese calligraphy is presented through the courtesy of the Honorable Han Xu, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the United States.)

³ Reproduced with permission from Liotta D. et al; *The Artificial heart in Cheng T.O. Editor, The International Textbook of Cardiology, New York, Pergamon Press, 1986: 1164-81 pages.*

From the linguistic point of view, the Chinese language comes from the Tibet - Birmania Family as the Thai of Tonkin and the Miao of Kuei-tche⁴.

*In short, a distinct doctrine founded in philological deep-rooted facts and within the strictest scientific aspect, has unquestionably demonstrated the lack of relation between Chinese and Aryan languages whatsoever.

We have pointed out quite rightly in our own studies, a passionate discovery. The phonemes **to be born** and **to live** are represented by a bud of bamboo together with the hieroglyph of the heart. Obviously, it means the cycle of yearly seasons.

It is almost a rule that the vitality of nature, the cycle of yearly seasons, awakened in the popular mind of unrecorded communities certain fashion habit, and early expressions of final languages, (Angel J. Battistessa).

In fact, in Latin-speaking world the word *árbol* (Spanish), *arbre* (French), *arbolo* (Italian), whose meaning is tree, comes from Sanskrit, language in which this word means *to be born, to live, to grow up; (the mysterious bud of bamboo with the heart phoneme of Chinese language)*.

*It is evident that the comparative studies of Aryan and Chinese languages, absolutely distant and strange from the philological point of view, have demonstrated in the phonemic studies of the word heart a moving testimony, the spiritual unity of mankind.

*Mankind has a unique spiritual and common golden mother since the mists of time. The heart is at the core of this spiritual nucleus (D.Liotta).

The Spiritual Connotation of the Heart phoneme in Chinese Language is reflected in this book at the following references:

⁴ Paul Masson-Oursel, *Histoire de la Philosophie in Émile Bréhier Editor, Paris*.

Chapter 1, footnote 2; Chapter 2, footnote 6 and in "Practical Textbook of Congenital and Acquired Diseases of the Aorta, Editors D. Liotta, D.A. Cooley, M. del Rio, C. Cabrol et al, Chapter 27, Dr Cabrol's Master Lecture, page 330.

'Thank you, Dr Liotta; I'd like to continue with the basics of Taoist philosophy.'

'In its broad outline, there was a time, before the time, which was before the beginning. Before heaven and earth took shape there was only undifferentiated formlessness.

In this cosmological evolution, then, Tao originated from vacuity, and vacuity produced the Universe, which in turn produced Nature and material forces. These combined material forces of heaven and earth form *Yin and Yang*.

Yin, means a cold time, *the interior* (feminine nature). *Yang*, means the exterior, the outdoors (masculine nature). *Yang*, means a hot sunny climate.

That is the origin of the marvelous principle of Yang and Yin, their forces work in cosmological alternation.

And, it traces out the inherent nature of the common way of life of older agrarian communities, the alternation of life and death. The cyclic alternation of vegetation.

The Tao is circulating everywhere in the Universe and never stands still, its forces are always out in active matter. The Taoist Saint reaches the vacuity of his own being and rests at the periphery of the circuit and there is no place in him to death.

The Taoist structure of ecstasy is closer to shamanism (M. Granet, *La pensée Chinoise* [the Chinese thought], Paris). In fact, in both the mystic experience of ecstasy in Taoism and the ecstasy in Shamanism, the soul is alike; it leaves the body.

The utmost romance of philosophy Taoist is longevity. The immortality, strictly speaking, is accomplished with the reunion in a person of the two Epiphanies of the lasting realities, the *Yang and the Yin*. That is, matter and spirit, life and death. This is the philosophy of the *Yin and Yang of Chinese*

School, according to which all things are product of the *cosmic negative and positive energies*.

Tao is the way of communication between heaven and earth. Remember, dear reader, the similarity of the *cosmic tree* of primitive agrarian communities; the *endless column* of Brancusi (see Chapter 1).

‘Though devotion of popular Taoism concentrates on piety, its chief objectives are earthly blessing, happiness, health, wealth, the begetting of children and most of all, longevity’.

‘May I interrupt you Professor?’

‘Of course’

*I have almost fully covered the walls at home with gifts from my Chinese friends. Many are true iconographical representations of Taoist philosophy. And, I am just looking at one painting in ink on silk and I would like to show it to Rodrigo.

The painting is called “*Fishing in a mountain stream*”. It suggests the Taoist concept of the unity of the Universe. It is represented a valley, *the Divinity of the Valley*, the obscure female that never dies (*the Yin*). In Taoism the image of the *valley* indicated vacuity and at the same time the receptacle of the water, then the fertility.

The vacuity is associated with the idea of maternity and fecundity (*the Yin*). The higher mountain peaks are sunny because of the bright light coming from heaven, (*the Yang*).

*The mountain, the valley, the water stream, the bright light and the smallness of the human figures fishing in a mountain stream, convey the Taoist idea of man’s relative role in the magnificent universal order of nature.

The *wu-wei* of philosophical Taoism, an ancient Chinese system of life, could be of a great help in modern-time man to reach a life of spiritual quietude. It should be the best weapon to fight the extended modern disease of pessimism and depression into the false

business of mere money -making?. Good, but is it possible today ?

The truth, however, is that if we, in a sort of virtual image, observe in the early evening pleasant men walking at sundown with their wives and happy jumping children on their way home, it is a film of the 19th century, almost lost in modern time.

Healthy work for the uneducated ordinary worker, without praise, having nearly no rest, merely fulfilling his task with dignity, hopeless and spurned is a common film getting from bad to worse in modern time. My friends, it is even more than a common film, primarily in poor underdeveloped countries.

‘And, heartily in a real truth I can tell you, religion faith is the utmost effective weapon in any circumstance,’ interrupted Inima.

I continued; during my mission in China in 1990 Olga and I enjoyed visiting the Ming Dynasty’s Tombs again. My friend Tian You Wang, chief of Cardiovascular surgery at the Friendship Hospital in Beijing accompanied us.

At the gate, from a small balcony, we were looking at the green, far-away field. Close to us were a group of monks, about eight, wearing long orange tunics. I do not know why it occurred to me that they were Taoist Monks.

‘Do you think, Tian You, they could be Taoist Monks?’ I asked. He glanced at me with repression and silencing gestures. ‘I do not believe in this stupidity, we believe and belong to new generations,’ Dr Wang finally answered sharply.

During my mission in China in 1973, I visited the Service of Dr Wang Yi-Shan, Professor of Cardiac Surgery at Shanghai Second Medical University and there I was invited to attend a lecture given by a prestigious orthopedic surgeon.

He was a pioneer in the implant of totally severed arms. At a certain moment the orthopedic surgeon explained to me that the

greatest surgical difficulty in the technique of arm implantation was the reestablishment of the venous blood return from the transplanted arm.

And indeed, he had been marvelously aided. In fact, it happened when he was literally reading the political little red book by Mao Tze Tung, and then, and only then, he could resolve the surgical technical difficulties of the venous blood return from transplanted upper extremities.

And, with possessed pride he lifted his arm with the little red book by Mao and gestured toward the audience. What had happened, what was the miracle?. The orthopedic surgeon suddenly found the higher inspiration and certainly the technical solution in the book by Mao.

The little red book was directly responsible for having our distinguished orthopedic surgeon attain the highest culture of surgery within the reach of mankind!

As a religion of masses, Taoism has rapidly faded away since the Communist Government came to power in China (1949). Without leadership, financial resources or recruitment for priests and with official indifference, its future as a religion is dim.

Nevertheless many elements of Taoism, its fairy tales and its magic esthetic imagination, are still rich in Chinese folk life, especially in rural festivals. Meanwhile, the virtuous life and spiritual serenity of Taoist philosophy will hopefully continue to influence the venerable mysteries of the distinctive character of Chinese soul, worthy of all respect.

*Humbly, I dedicate the research of the heart ideograms incorporated into Chinese hieroglyphs -the discovery of the spiritual core of mankind- to my old friends and dear physicians of China.

Extracted from: "Amazing Adventures of a Heart Surgeon", Liotta's International Thesaurus- Chapter 3
