

THE ETHEREAL SOUL (*HUN*)

魂

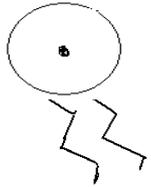
HUN

云

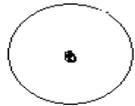
CLOUDS (*YUN*)

鬼

GUI



OLD CHARACTER FOR *GUI*



Head of dead person without a body



Swirling movement of the “ghost” of dead person in the realm of spirits

The Hun enters the body 3 days after birth and is imparted by the father. Ethereal in nature, after death it survives the body and flows back to "Heaven" (Tian).



The Hun broadly corresponds to our Western concept of “soul”. According to ancient Chinese beliefs it enters the body shortly after birth. Ethereal in nature, after death it survives the body and flows back to “Heaven” (*Tian*); this is the ancient Chinese concept of “Heaven”, i.e. a state of subtle and non-material energies and beings, and has therefore nothing to do with the Western and Christian concept of “Heaven”. The Hun can be described as *“that part of the Soul [as opposed to Po] which at death leaves the body, carrying with it an appearance of physical form”*.

It is interesting to note that, when describing the changes occurring at death, Chinese books say that the Hun, and not the Shen returns to “Heaven”: this would seem to confirm that the *Shen* has indeed the nature of Mind rather than “Spirit”.

As the term “Heaven” recurs very frequently in Chinese medicine, it is useful to try and describe its meaning.

Ames opts not to translate the Chinese term *Tian* as, according to him, the word “Heaven” would immediately give it Judeo-Christian connotations. He also rejects the translation of *Tian* as “Nature”.¹

Ames says: “*The God of the Bible, often referred to metonymically as “Heaven”, created the world, but Tian in classical Chinese is the world. Tian is both what our world is and how it is.*”²

1. Ames R T and Rosemont H 1999 *The Analects of Confucius - A Philosophical Translation*, Ballantine Books, New York, p. 46.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

Ames and Hall list three main meanings of *Tian*: firstly, *Tian* 天 is both *what* our world is and *how* it is. *Tian* is both creator and the field of creatures. There is no apparent distinction between the order itself and what orders it.

Secondly, *Tian* is self-so-ing (*zi ran* 自然, which most people translate as “Nature”).

Thirdly, *Tian* is antropomorphic, suggesting its intimate relationship with the process of euhemerization (creating a divine mythology from dead heroes) that grounds Chinese ancestor worship. It is probably this common foundation in ancestor worship that allowed for the conflation of the Shang dynasty *Di* 帝 with the notion of *Tian* imported with the Zhou tribes. *Tian* does not speak but communicates effectively, although not always clearly, through oracles, through perturbations in the climate and through alterations in the natural conditions of the human world.¹

1. Hall D Ames R 1998 Thinking from the Han, State University of New York Press, New York., pp. 242-3.

But there is also another meaning of *Tian* which is important from the point of view of Chinese medicine and that is that *Tian* is also the collective community of the dead (and that is why the Hun goes to “Heaven” after death).

Ames say: *“In the absence of some transcendent creator deity as the repository of truth, beauty and goodness, Tian would seem to stand for a cumulative and continuing cultural legacy focused in the spirits of those who have come before. Tian is anthropomorphic, suggesting its intimate relationship with the process of euhemerization -historical human beings becoming gods- that grounds Chinese ancestor reverence.”*²

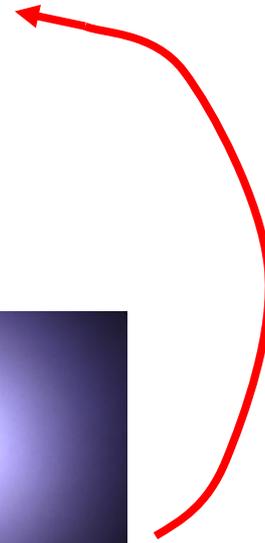
2. Ibid., p. 47.

The Daoist Classic *Huai Nan Zi*, often quoted by Zhu Xi describes clearly the origin of Heaven and Earth: “*When Heaven and Earth did not yet have physical form, there was only undifferentiated formlessness. Therefore it is called the great beginning. The Dao began from the empty extensiveness and this empty extensiveness produced the universe. The universe produced Qi. Qi had limits.*”

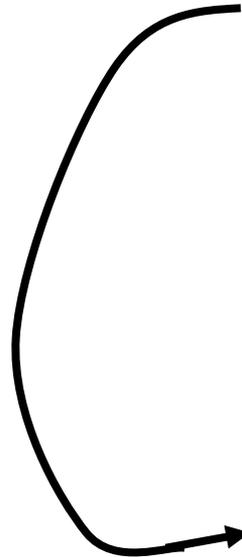
That which was clear and light drifted upwards and became Heaven; that which was heavy and turbid congealed and became the Earth. The union of the clear and refined is especially easy, whereas the congelation of the heavy and turbid is extremely difficult. Therefore, Heaven was formed first and then the Earth was formed later.”³

3. Kim Yung Sik 2000 *The Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, p. 135.

TIAN 天



Clear and light



Heavy and turbid



DI 地

The concept of Hun is closely linked to ancient Chinese beliefs in spirits or *gui*. According to these beliefs, spirits are creatures who preserve a physical appearance after death and wander in the world of spirit. Some are good and some are evil.

In the times prior to the Warring States period (476–221 BC), such spirits were considered to be the main cause of disease. Since the Warring States period, a belief in naturalistic causes of disease (such as weather or diet) gradually came to the fore; however, the belief in spirits has never really disappeared, even to the present day (see recent article about sale of female corpses to be sold as brides for the afterlife).



There are three types of Hun:

1. A **vegetative** one called *Shuang Ling* ("Clear Ling") common to plants, animals and human beings



2. An **animal** one called *Tai Guang* ("Brilliant Light") common to animals and human beings



3. A **human** one called *You Jing* ("Dark Jing") found only in human beings.



Aristotle conceived of three souls: vegetative, animal and human.

This image of a cigarette conveys the different destinies of the Hun, Po and Shen at death: as the cigarette is extinguished, the Hun survives and goes to “Heaven” in the form of smoke, the Po dies with the body and returns to Earth in the form of ashes, the Shen is extinguished (the cigarette itself) and the Jing is used up (in the form of tobacco).



Smoke going up to “Heaven” is Hun

Tobacco is Jing

Cigarette is Shen

Ashes going down to Earth are Po

The fact that the Hun is imparted by the father after birth is significant as it is symbolical of the social, relational nature of the Hun (as opposed to the Po). The Hun is responsible for relationships and our relating to the other people in the family and society. The ceremony during which the father imparted the Hun and the name to the baby three days after birth is therefore symbolical of the fact that, through this ceremony, the baby was assigned his or her place in the family and society.

The Hun corresponds to our individuality, but an individuality within the family and society.



According to Granet (*La Religione dei Cinesi*) Hun is ethereal, is last to arrive (after birth) and first to go (after death). According to him, the Hun corresponds to the higher aspect of personality, to the personal name through which each person takes his or her social and family place: the Hun conferred one one's individuality.

MING=NAME

名

Not by chance, cognate with *ming* 命 destiny but note that *ming* also means “life”, “order”, “to assign” (a name, a title)

