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October 1945

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# Ancient Chinese Knowledge of Human Heredity

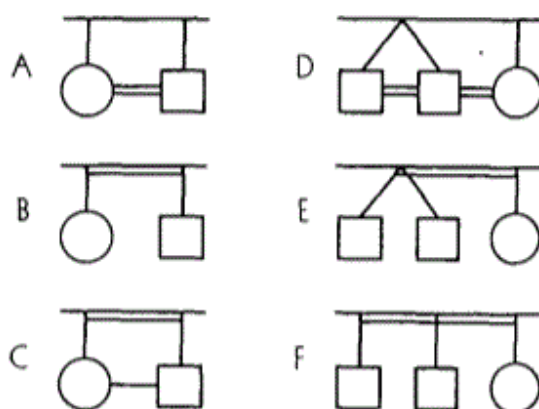
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*Journal of Heredity*, Volume 36, Issue 10, October 1945, Page 296,  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jhered.a105421>

**Published:** 01 October 1945

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**SYMBOLS COMPARED**

Figure 3

A—Macklin's symbol for fraternal twins. B—The author's symbol for fraternal twins which avoids disturbing the marriage line. C—Symbol representing marriage of fraternal twins. D—Macklin's symbol for triplets comprising identical twin boys and a sister. E—The author's symbol for the same triplets shown in D. F—Symbol suggested for fraternal triplets; compare with B.

record of the marriage of twins has been discovered by the writer a brother-sister marriage in this country has been reported as recently as 1940 in the *Scientific American*.<sup>2</sup> It is well known that such marriages were common long ago among the royal families of Egypt and the Hawaiian Islands.<sup>3</sup> The employment of pedigree charts for live stock, pets, etc., might require recording matings of fraternal twins much more often than in the case of man (Figure 3C). This

likelihood further indicates the need of caution in the selection of symbols so as to avoid both ambiguity and confusion in the use of previously accepted signs such as the marriage line.

Dr. Macklin submitted another symbol (Figure 3D) the adoption of which might also lead to difficulty. This designation was intended to represent triplets comprising a pair of identical twin boys and a sister. As a simplification of her symbol (Figure 3D) it is suggested that a different one (Figure 3E) be adopted. This symbol avoids confusion in the use of the marriage line. Similarly, instead of using a "double bond" between each of the siblings of a set of fraternal triplets, quadruplets, etc., the double fraternity line would again be utilized (Figure 3E).

The above suggestions may seem trivial, but since analysis of genetic data depends so much upon the use of proper symbols it is important that such be carefully chosen for their simplicity and freedom from ambiguity.

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2. *Scientific American*, 162:232, April 1940.
3. POPENOE, PAUL. *Hygeia*, p. 980—, Nov. 1937.

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### Ancient Chinese Knowledge of Human Heredity

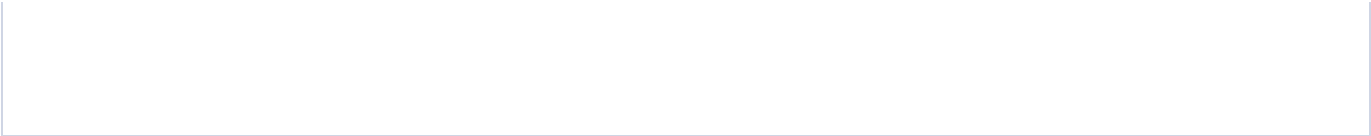
IN one chapter of the writings of the Chinese philosopher and mystic Chuangtse, who died around 275 B.C., the following phrase is found according to a recent translation by Lin Yutang:<sup>\*</sup> "Joined toes and extra fingers (i.e. the Mendelian characters web-toe and polydactyly) seem to come from nature, yet, functionally speaking, they are superfluous." As the following phrase begins "Goiters and tumors seem to come from the body," it appears justified to interpret the words "to come from nature" as meaning: are inborn, hereditary; "na-

ture" being used in the Spencerian sense of nature vs. nurture. The philosopher obviously quotes the observation as a generally known fact, which he uses for the sake of drawing an ethical parallel. While it would be far fetched to call Chuangtse a precursor of human genetics, yet it seems worthy of recording that he could use facts of human heredity as a matter of common knowledge when elaborating a philosophical idea by means of a simile.

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\*The Wisdom of India and China. Edited by Lin Yutang. Random House, New York See p. 666.



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