Yin-Yang Theory in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Yin and Yang is the foundation of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and is applied to diagnosis and treatment. It is considered the most important theory in TCM, underlying all physiology, pathology, and treatment. The earliest reference to Yin and Yang is in approximately 700 BC.

The ancient scholars observed 2 phases of constant and cyclical change. Yin changes into Yang, and Yang changes back into Yin. Within the diagram below, you will find a few general qualities of both Yin (right) and Yang (left). Also notice how Yin has a component of Yang, and Yang has a component of Yin (the dots). Yin-Yang is probably the single most important and distinctive theory of Chinese Medicine. They represent opposite but complementary qualities. Each thing or phenomenon that we encounter in the world could be itself and its contrary, and as you will learn over the coming years, this concept is at the heart of everything in Traditional Chinese Medicine. On the next page, you will see four aspects of Yin and Yang relationships that are important to understand. They are, 1) the opposition of Yin and Yang, 2) the interdependence of Yin and Yang, 3) the mutual consumption of Yin and Yang and 4) the Inter-transformation of Yin and Yang. These four aspects of the Yin and Yang relationship describe the interplay and the different states of Yin and Yang.
FOUR ASPECTS OF YIN-YANG RELATIONSHIP

1) **Opposition of Yin and Yang**: Yin and Yang are opposite stages either of a cycle or of states of being. The opposite is relative and can only be spoken of in relation to its opposite. For example, water is Yin relative to steam, but Yang relative to ice.

2) **Interdependence of Yin and Yang**: Although Yin and Yang are opposite, they are also interdependent: one cannot exist without the other. The diagram on page 2 shows the interdependence of Yin and Yang. Nothing is totally Yin and nothing is totally Yang. They are constantly transforming into one another. For example, no day without night.

3) **Mutual consumption of Yin and Yang**: When either Yin or Yang are out of balance, they necessarily affect each other and change their proportion and therefore achieve a new balance. There is normally a harmonious balance of Yin and Yang, but when they are out of balance they affect, and weaken (consume) the other. For example, here are 4 states of Yin Yang imbalance:

   - Preponderance (Excess) of Yin
   - Preponderance (Excess) of Yang
   - Weakness (Deficiency) of Yin
   - Weakness (Deficiency) of Yang

4) **Inter-transformation of Yin and Yang**: Yin and Yang are not static, but actually transform into each other. This is not a random event; it occurs at the right moment. For example, spring arrives when winter is over.
**Yin-Yang Correspondences**

There are two forces in the universe, according to Chinese theory: YIN is the passive, negative force, and YANG the active, positive force. According to this theory, you can detect these forces in the seasons, in your food, and so on, and can regulate your lives accordingly.

Yin-Yang Theory teaches that everything is a product of 2 principles, YIN which is considered weak, female, and destructive and YANG which is considered strong, male and creative. The interaction between these two principles produce the Five Elements (we will see this concept in the following pages).

The chart on the next page shows Yin-Yang Theory applied to different categories in the natural world, and how it manifests different meanings. Here are several examples of Yin-Yang in nature and the fluidity and movement that it possesses. Remember, Yin and Yang are constantly changing and cyclical!

We can look at the categories on the Yin Yang Correspondences chart and see, that for example, the category of Sky under Yin manifests Moon, while the same category of Sky manifests Sun under Yang.

*Now you give it a try!*

Solidity in Yin produces Dense. Solidity in Yang produces___________________?

Did you say Porous? That’s right!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YIN-YANG Correspondences</th>
<th>Macrocosm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. YIN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Temperature</td>
<td>5. Cold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yin-Yang continued

In the diagram below, we have another perspective of Yin-Yang Theory. Before we get into reviewing the picture, let's briefly recap some important concepts to remember.

Recap:

- Yin Yang is the fundamental principle, and the most important theory in Traditional Chinese Medicine, underlying all physiology, pathology & treatment.
- Yin has a component of Yang, and Yang has a component of Yin (remember the dots!).
- Yin and Yang are constantly changing and cyclical.

Directly below you will find a series of patterned lines which are used to symbolize the different stages of Yin-Yang. You will see how they are used in the diagram on the following page to symbolize the relationships between Yin and Yang in the universe.

Combining the two, we have the four stages of Yin and Yang...

(2 Yin)  (1 Yin over 1 Yang)  (2 Yang)  (1 Yang over 1 Yin)

With addition of an extra line, the Eight Trigrams (Ba Gua) were formed, illustrating all the directions.

The Eight Trigrams were combined to form 64 hexagrams, symbolizing all possible phenomena of the Universe.
The yin-yang line patterns further develop into 64 hexagrams which represent all possible situations and changes in the universe. In turn, all things and all changes can be described in terms of Yin-Yang activity and further developed by the concept of the five elements.

Take a look at the Ba Gua below and notice how the eight trigrams are incorporated into it as well as the five elements. Each direction has a particular yin-yang stage. The Ba Gua are eight trigrams which represent the fundamental principles of reality, seen as a range of eight interrelated concepts. Essentially it denotes the balance of Yin and Yang. Each consists of three lines, each line either "broken" or "unbroken."
So let’s try this!

What is a Ba Gua?

*Did you say a compilation of 8 trigrams representing Yin or Yang at different stages? Super! You are doing great.*

- The development of all phenomena in the universe is the result of the interplay of Yin and Yang; every phenomenon contains within itself both aspects in different degrees of manifestation.
- Important to understand that the two opposite states are not independent of each other, but they change into each other.
- In its purest form, Yang is totally immaterial and corresponds to pure energy.
- Yin, in its coarsest and densest form, is totally material and corresponds to matter.
- So energy and matter are but two states of a continuum, with an infinite possible number of states of aggregation.
So let’s give this a try:

Is Spring considered a Yang within Yin?

Did you answer yes? Great!
Five Elements

The 5 elements represent the five materials and the five movements in nature. Each element is generated by another: Fire is the child of Wood, Earth is the child of Fire, etc. In nature, we see this in the seasonal changes: Winter transforms into spring, spring changes into summer. The Five Elements relate to each other in different ways. We will see the different sequences of the Five Elements in the following pages.

1. The first cycle/sequence is called the **Generating Sequence** or the Mother-Child relationship. As in the cycle of the seasons, each element generates another, for example, one element is the "mother" of the next.

2. The second cycle/sequence is called the **Controlling Sequence** or Father-Child relationship. Each element is said to control, check, or regulate another. This cycle ensures that a balance is maintained between elements.

3. The third cycle/sequence is the **Insulting Sequence** and is the reverse of the Controlling sequence. In this sequence, the element that should BE controlled becomes imbalanced and excessive, and controls the element that normally controls it. For example, instead of Metal controlling Wood, if Wood becomes excessive, it can "insult" Metal, causing it to become imbalanced. This is akin to the child rebelling and insulting or trying to discipline its father.

**Now you give it a try!**

Take a look at the five elements picture on the following page. Can we say that water generates wood?

Yes  No

*Did you say yes? Great! That’s correct.*
Here is a chart to help you identify what is a generating element and the relationship each has.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generating</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood (Liver) creates Fire (Heart)</td>
<td>Wood (Liver) is the Mother of Fire (Heart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire (Heart) creates Earth (Spleen)</td>
<td>Fire (Heart) is the Mother of Earth (Spleen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth (Spleen) creates Metal (Lungs)</td>
<td>Earth (Spleen) is the Mother of Metal (Lungs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal (Lungs) creates Water (Kidneys)</td>
<td>Metal (Lungs) is the Mother of Water (Kidneys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water (Kidneys) creates Wood (Liver)</td>
<td>Water (Kidneys) is the Mother of Wood (Liver)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Together with the theory of Yin-Yang, the theory of the **Five Elements** constitutes the basis of Chinese medical theory.

The five Elements are not basic constituents of Nature, but five basic processes, qualities, phases of a cycle or inherent capabilities of change of phenomena.

- **Water moistens downwards.**
- **Fire flares upwards.**
- **Wood can be bent and straightened.**
- **Metal can be molded and can harden.**
- **Earth permits sowing, growing and reaping.**
Controlling and Creation Cycles

The diagrams on the next page demonstrate the interrelationship between the five elements and the controlling and creation cycles. As we mentioned for the Generating Sequence, each element generates another and in the **Controlling Sequence** each element is said to control, check, or regulate another.

**Controlling Sequence**

- Wood controls Earth
- Earth controls Water
- Water controls Fire
- Fire controls Metal
- Metal controls Wood

Each element is of course then controlled by another. Can you identify the cycle in the diagram?

- Earth is controlled by Wood
- Wood is controlled by Metal, etc.

**This cycle ensures that a balance is maintained between elements.**

Carefully look at the two diagrams on the next page and see if you can identify the relationships in each picture!

For example, Wood controls Earth, but it is controlled by Metal.

**Now you give it a try!**

In this sequence each Element controls another and is controlled by one. It is called the ________________Sequence.

*Did you say Controlling Sequence? That’s correct!*  
What type of sequence is this? Wood generates Fire, Fire generates Earth, Earth generates Metal, Metal generates Water and Water generates Wood.

*Did you say Generating Sequence? Great job.*
Try drawing the Generating Sequence below.

Try drawing the Controlling Sequence below.
The Insulting (Wu) Sequence

This diagram demonstrates the reverse sequence of the Controlling Sequence. As we mentioned, in the Insulting Sequence, the element that should be controlled becomes imbalanced and excessive, and controls the element that normally controls it. This sequence is literally called "insulting" in Chinese. It takes place in the reverse order than the Controlling Sequence.
The Insulting Sequence

- Wood insults Metal,
- Metal insults Fire,
- Fire insults Water,
- Water insults Earth
- Earth insults Wood.

Now you try it!

The Insulting Sequence is the reverse of what other sequence?

Did you say Controlling Sequence? Great job!

Draw the Insulting Cycle below. Take special care to notice the differences in direction. Compare your drawing to your Generating and Controlling drawings.
Five Elements Correspondences

Each of the elements is connected to different parts of our world, like organs, emotions, and stages of life. The five elements theory describes energetic balances and correspondences within the body and outside the body, and how these interact to generate health or disease. The five elements theory provides a means of organizing and grouping concepts into a workable whole.

These should be viewed as tendencies towards transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Fire</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organs</td>
<td>Liver/Gall Bladder</td>
<td>Heart/Small Intestine</td>
<td>Spleen/Stomach</td>
<td>Lung/Large Intestine</td>
<td>Kidney/Bladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasons</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Late Summer</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Factors</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Damp</td>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>Cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth &amp; Development</td>
<td>Birth/Infant</td>
<td>Growth/Young adult</td>
<td>Transformation/Adult</td>
<td>Reaping, Harvest/Old Age</td>
<td>Storage/Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions/ Stages of the Day</td>
<td>East Dawn</td>
<td>South Midday</td>
<td>Center Transition</td>
<td>West Dusk</td>
<td>North Midnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Grief/Sorrow</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes</td>
<td>Sour</td>
<td>Bitter</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Pungent</td>
<td>Salty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colors</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds</td>
<td>Shout</td>
<td>Laughing</td>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>Groaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odors</td>
<td>Rancid</td>
<td>Acrid/Burnt</td>
<td>Fragrant</td>
<td>Rotten</td>
<td>Putrid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The system of correspondences is an important part of the 5-Element theory.

This system is typical of the ancient Chinese thought, linking many different phenomena and qualities within the microcosm and macrocosm under the guidance of a certain Element.

One of the most typical aspects of Chinese Medicine is the commonality between phenomena in Nature and in the human body.

Some of these correspondences are commonly verified and experienced all the time in clinical practice, while some may seem far-fetched, but the feeling remains that there is a profound wisdom underlying all of them which is, at times unfathomable.

Let’s try this!

The emotion of Joy is associated to which element?

*Did you say Fire? That’s correct!*

Yellow is associated with which element?

*Did you say Earth? Yup! That’s correct!*

How many elements are there in Traditional Chinese Medicine?

*Did you say 5? Right again!*
Chinese Medicine Map of Tongue

In TCM, the tongue is an important indicator of the body’s health. On the next page, is a basic tongue map used for tongue diagnostics. The tongue has many relationships and connections in the body. It is useful and important during inspection for confirming Traditional Chinese Medicine diagnosis as you transition into your second and third years of clinic. It can help you identify your patients overall harmony or disharmony. Below are just a few characteristics you will be assessing during tongue diagnosis of your patients in clinic. Each of these characteristics will provide particular information on the wellbeing of your patient. You will delve further into these characteristics in your classes and in clinic.

- **Body color**: condition of Blood, Nutritive Qi and Yin organs
- **Body shape**: state of Blood and Nutritive Qi
- **Coating**: state of Yang organs
- **Moisture**: state of the Body Fluids
- **Tongue areas**: (See the map)

Take a look at the tongue diagram on the next page and review how the tongue is divided into sections that correspond to particular organs. The normal tongue in Traditional Chinese Medicine has a light red or pinkish body with a thin white coating.
Below are a few definitions of words you saw in the text above.

**Definitions:**

**Nutritive Qi** - Ying Qi nourishes the internal organs and the whole body. It is closely related to Blood, and flows with Blood in the vessels as well as in the channels.

**Yin Organs** - Liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys and pericardium. The Yin organs produce, transform, regulate, and store essential substances.

**Yang Organs** - Gall bladder, stomach, small intestine, bladder, and triple burner. They are responsible for digestion and transmitting nutrients.

**What are the meridians of the body?**

Qi energy flows through the meridian or energy highway in the body. Meridians flow within the body and not on the surface, meridians exist in corresponding pairs and each meridian has many acupuncture points along its path.
Pulse Diagnosis

Pulse and tongue diagnosis are two of the more important tools in Chinese medicine in order for you to diagnose your patient, which is used to plan his/her treatment.

While tongue diagnosis provides valuable clinical information, the pulse can be used to gain a deep understanding of the patient on many levels.

The pulse provides immediate and specific information that can help clarify contradictory diagnostic information and symptomology.

Location of the Pulse: The Guan (Second) Position is found opposite the styloid process of the radius, the Cun Position is found between the Guan Position and the wrist and the Chi position is found at a point equal the distance between Guan and Cun.
PULSE DIAGNOSIS

• The three sections of the pulse at the radial artery are called "inch" (CUN), "barrier" (GUAN) and "cubit" (CHI).

• Here they will be called "Front", "Middle" and "Rear" respectively.

• The upper [distal] position corresponds to Heaven and reflects diseases from the chest to the head;

• The middle position corresponds to Person and reflects diseases between the diaphragm and umbilicus;

• The lower [proximal] position corresponds to Earth and reflects diseases from below the umbilicus to the feet".

• Traditionally, the best time for taking the pulse is in the early morning when the Yin is calm and the Yang has not yet come forth.

• The patient's arm should be horizontal and should not be held higher than the level of the heart.

• The practitioner's fingers are all placed on the pulse, which is felt with the first three fingers.

Let’s try this!

Guan corresponds to Person and reflects diseases between the _____________ and ____________.

*Did you say diaphragm and umbilicus? That’s correct!*

The three sections of the pulse at the radial artery are called...

*Did you say CUN, GUAN and CHI? That’s correct!*
Causes (San Yin) of Diseases

So far, we have touched on Yin-Yang Theory, Five Element Theory, Tongue Diagnosis, and Pulse Diagnosis. Now let’s take a look at how Traditional Chinese Medicine thinks about the causes of disease. They are separated into the 1) Internal causes, 2) External causes, and 3) Other causes.

If you remember looking at the five elements correspondences chart, you will remember that joy was connected to the element of fire. Wood on the other hand is associated with the emotion of anger and is associated with the yin organ liver and the yang organ the gall bladder. So if the patient’s body is not in harmony, disease has a tendency to manifest in the corresponding organ(s). You can also take a look at the chart below and see what other correspondences you can identify!

### Abbreviated Table of Correspondences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Winter</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Late Summer</th>
<th>Autumn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climatic Qi</td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Damp</td>
<td>Dryness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Organ</td>
<td>Bladder</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
<td>Sm. Intestine</td>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>Lg. Intestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yin Organ</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Lung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense Organ</td>
<td>Ears</td>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Tongue</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Tissue</td>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>Sinews</td>
<td>Blood Vessel</td>
<td>Muscles</td>
<td>Skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Joy/Spasm</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Salty</td>
<td>Sour</td>
<td>Bitter</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Spicy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now do the same for the internal causes (7 affects) external causes (6 evils) of diseases.

1. **Internal Causes: emotions (7 Affects)**
   - The seven emotions:
     - Anger, Joy, Worry, Pensiveness, Sadness, Fear, Shock

2. **External Causes: weather (6 Evils)**
   - The six Evils:
     - Wind (associated with Spring)
Heat (associated with Summer)

Dryness (associated with Autumn)

Cold (associated with Winter)

Fire (associated with Summer)

Dampness (associated with Late Summer)

3. Others Causes
   - Constitution
   - Fatigue/over exertion
   - Excessive sexual activity
   - Diet
   - Trauma
   - Epidemics
   - Parasites and poisons
   - Wrong treatment
The Functions of the Internal Organs

Each of these organs play a specific role in balancing the yin yang and 5 elements in the body. You will continue to gather more information on the function, diagnosis and treatment of each of these organs as you continue your studies.

Hint*** When you look at the functions of the following internal organs do not approach them with the Western perspective of function. Remember, Traditional Chinese Medicine is in relation to energy (Qi), Yin-Yang, and Five Element Theory.

The functions of the Heart

- It governs Blood
- It controls the blood vessels
- It manifests in the complexion
- It houses the Mind
- It opens into the tongue
- It controls sweat.

The functions of the Liver

- It stores Blood
- It ensures the smooth flow of Qi
- It controls the sinews
- It manifests in the nails
- It opens into the eyes
- It houses the Ethereal Soul
The functions of the Lungs

• govern Qi and respiration
• control channels and blood vessels
• control dispersing and descending
• They regulate Water passages
• They control skin and hair
• They open into the nose
• They house the Corporeal Soul

The functions of the Spleen

• It governs transformation and transportation
• It controls the Blood
• It controls the muscles and the four limbs
• It opens into the mouth and manifests in the lips
• It controls the "raising Qi"
• It houses Thought.
The functions of the Kidneys

- They store Essence and govern birth, growth, reproduction and development
- They produce Marrow, fill up the brain and control bones
- They govern Water
- They control the reception of Qi
- They store Essence and govern birth, growth, reproduction and development
- They produce Marrow, fill up the brain and control bones
- They govern Water
- They open into the ears
- They manifest in the hair
- They control the two lower orifices
- They house Will Power
The functions of the Pericardium

- The functions as an external covering of the Heart, protecting it from attacks by exterior pathogenic factors.
- "Simple Questions" chapter 8: "The Pericardium is the ambassador and from it joy and happiness derive".
- The Pericardium is of secondary importance to the Heart and it displays many of the same functions.

The functions of the Stomach

- It controls the "rotting and ripening" of food
- It controls the transportation of food essences
- It controls the descending of Qi.
- It is the origin of fluids.
The functions of the Small Intestine

- controls receiving and transforming
- Separates fluids.
- “Separates Clear from Turbid”
- From a psychological point of view, the Small Intestine has an influence on mental clarity and judgement.

The functions of the Large Intestine

- The main function of the Large Intestine is to receive food and drink from the Small Intestine.
- Having re-absorbed some of the fluids, it excretes the stools.
The functions of the Gall Bladder

- It stores and excretes bile
- It controls judgement / decisions
- It controls sinews.

The functions of the Bladder

- It removes water by Qi transformation.
The functions of the TRIPLE BURNER (San Jiao)

• "The Triple Burner is the official in charge of irrigation and it controls the water passages".

• “Name but No Form”

• "avenue for the Original Qi"

So by now you have a pretty good handle on the basic principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine! Remember that if you have questions about any of the information in this packet, you can ask your instructor in class. I recommend that you write notes and questions on your packet! Use the space below to jot down some questions you may have!