

TCM Module

Yin Yoga Teacher Training



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TCM Module (50hr)

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Section 1: Traditional Chinese Medicine: Core Themes

Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine

I'll be starting our journey into Chinese Medicine with an introductory group of sections on the theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The intention of this series is straightforward: I want to familiarize you with the core elements and concepts of Chinese Medicine, so that when we dive further into the functional relationships of things in Chinese Medicine, you'll have some command of the basic vocabulary and an understanding of what common terms indicate.

As a general overview of this particular series, I'll start out with a birds-eye view of Taoism and then look more closely at Yin and Yang theory, which is what the entire theory of Chinese Medicine is based upon. From there, I'll be examining the key components of the Chinese paradigm of human physiology and psychology. These key components include the concept Qi, the Meridians, the Vital Substances – such as Qi, Blood, and Essence – and the Internal Organs. My hope is that this exploration of these key elements will provide you with a solid foundation to better understand the complex and dynamic relationships between different organs and meridians in Chinese Medicine.

Holistic Medicine vs. Conventional Western Medicine

But before we look at these key elements of Chinese Medicine, I think it's important to step back and take a really big "macro" look at the kind of medicine that Traditional Chinese Medicine represents. Broadly speaking, we might say there are systems of medicine that are *holistic* in nature. And those holistic medical systems are often compared to what might be called Conventional Western Biomedicine, sometimes referred to as Allopathic medicine.

Traditional Chinese Medicine represents one kind of holistic medicine. Ayurvedic Medicine represents another.

But in general, a holistic approach to medicine will try to promote optimal health in a person and as a by-product, to prevent and treat disease," says Robert Ivker, Doctor of Osteopathy and former president of the American Holistic Medical Association. In contrast, he notes, Conventional Medicine primarily focuses "on the elimination of physical symptoms [and disease]."

A holistic approach to medicine will formulate a diagnosis of a patient's condition by taking into consideration the complex dynamic of everything going on internally with that patient, as well as external influences of interpersonal relationship, work, and climate. In contrast, a more conventional approach to medicine will try to identify a singular causative factor that generates illness and which needs to be eliminated or suppressed.

In terms of treatment strategies, holistic medical paradigms tend to focus on lifestyle factors, such as diet and exercise, "attitudinal and behavioral modifications," as well as various kinds of counseling. In contrast, the primary mode of treatment within conventional medicine tends to be drugs and surgery.

Based on this initial comparison, you might be assuming that I always favor holistic medical practice over conventional medical practice, but that would be an incorrect assumption. Both models have their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Where conventional medicine is highly effective at treating acute and life-threatening illnesses and injuries, holistic medicine is less effective. But where conventional medicine is less effective at preventing or working with chronic illness, holistic medicine is much better suited in that it "teaches patients to take responsibility for their own health, and in so doing is: cost-effective in treating both acute and chronic illness; therapeutic in preventing and treating chronic disease; and essential in creating optimal health (Ivker)."

Now, there's a kind of Yin and Yang relationship here that we talked about at acupuncture school where, as a generalization, Western Medicine is "Yang" in nature – it's fast and strong in treating acute conditions that are serious and life-threatening. And Chinese Medicine is a kind of holistic medicine that is usually, though not always, slower in terms of its effect – yet better suited for more chronic, long-term conditions.

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the emergent discipline in Western Medicine known as Functional Medicine. To my knowledge, Functional Medicine is very similar to the holistic approach found within Traditional Chinese Medicine.

From the Institute for Functional Medicine website:

"Functional Medicine asks how and why illness occurs and restores health by addressing the root causes of disease for each individual. The Functional Medicine model is an individualized patient-centered, science-based approach that empowers patients and practitioners to work together to address the underlying causes of disease and promote optimal wellness. It relies on a detailed understanding of each patient's genetic, biochemical, and lifestyle factors and leverages that data to direct personalized treatment plans that lead to improved patient outcomes."

"By addressing root cause, rather than symptoms, practitioners become oriented to identifying the complexity of disease. They may find one condition has many different causes and, likewise, one cause may result in many different conditions. As a result, Functional Medicine treatment targets the specific manifestations of disease in each individual."

What is so striking to my ear when I read this is that with just a few minor changes of terminology, this could easily be a passage taken from a book describing the basic theory of Chinese Medicine.

In Chinese Medicine, we speak repeatedly about understanding the root of the disharmony – and treating that root – in addition to addressing the branch (or symptoms) of a particular disharmony. This approach to treatment is inevitably quite unique to the individual as each person will present with an imbalance unique to them.

It will likely be helpful, if you're new to this way of thinking, to root this theory of thinking about disease with a few examples.

Example: Headaches.

If you go to your conventional doctor and complain of headaches, they will likely prescribe some kind of anti-inflammatory drug, such as an NSAID to reduce the pain and send you on your merry way. There is often little interest in uncovering what is causing the headaches, or the specific manifestation of the kind of headache you're presenting with. There's a simple kind of linear thinking that says, "Oh, you have pain? Take this and it should go away." And, in the event that it doesn't go away, "Ok then try taking this, instead."

From a more holistic model as is found in Traditional Chinese Medicine, a lot more information on the *pattern* of what's going on is required to make an accurate diagnosis. The practitioner of Chinese Medicine will ask you many questions about the headache, itself... questions about its location, duration, severity of pain, things that occur with it, or lead up to its appearance. You'll be asked questions about what makes it better, or worse. In addition to these questions about the specific symptom, the Chinese Medical practitioner will also ask you myriad questions about your health in general, about your digestion, your sleep, your elimination, your overall energy, what kinds of things you like, and what kinds of things you avoid or that cause you aggravation. They'll ask about your home and work conditions. Then after gathering this whole web of data, the practitioner will start to identify a particular pattern of disharmony that supports the symptomatic presentation of, in this example, a headache.

Then, after a pattern of disharmony is discerned, the practitioner will try to help rectify this pattern of disharmony with acupuncture, herbs, diet, and other lifestyle recommendations.

To be clear, in Chinese Medical diagnosis, one symptom – in this case, headaches – might have 5-6 common patterns of disharmony that lead to its manifestation.

In the case of headaches, from a Chinese Medical perspective, many unique patterns may be causing the headache to arise. Some patterns are the result of external invasions, whereby Cold, Heat or Dampness invade the body, usually with Wind to cause a headache. Or an internal pattern of either excess or deficiency gives rise to headaches. Internal patterns include Liver-Qi Stagnation, Dampness, Blood Stagnation, Qi Deficiency, Blood Deficiency, and Kidney Deficiency, to name some of the common patterns. The point here is that the trained practitioner must perform a differential diagnosis in order to determine what pattern is manifest in the individual and resulting in headaches.

As you can see, the symptom here does not determine the treatment, but rather the underlying pattern of disharmony determines the course of the treatment strategy. And this was something that was drilled into us at acupuncture school over and over again. I can still hear my TCM Theory instructor Joe Kay bellowing from behind his podium: "One sign or symptom means absolutely NOTHING." Here a sign is something that the practitioner can observe, like how a patient walks, or the color of a patient's complexion. And a symptom is something that the patient subjectively reports.

So often, people will ask us acupuncturists, "Can acupuncture treat X?" For example, "Can acupuncture treat anxiety?" On one level, the answer is NO, acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine does not treat one sign or symptom on its own. What Chinese Medicine treats is the **underlying pattern of disharmony** that manifests with this specific symptom. But, in a circular sense, by addressing the underlying pattern of disharmony, the symptom of anxiety is treated.

Now, I really want to make this clear in this introduction to Chinese Medicine because I think it's all too easy to reduce complex systems to simplistic systems. And with Chinese Medicine, there's a tendency to reduce the complexity and power of its diagnostic methodology and treatment strategy to a simplistic Mickey Mouse kind of Chinese Medicine.

How does this Mickey Mouse simplification show up? Here's an example: Oh, you have headaches? I heard Large Intestine 4 point is good for headaches, let's either massage that or, if you're an acupuncturist, let's put a needle in that point. Here, no comprehensive intake has been done. No differential diagnosis has been developed. No pattern of disharmony identified. And there's no unique treatment strategy. And that's not how Traditional Chinese Medicine works. Again, I hear my old TCM Theory lecturer's voice booming: "Traditional Chinese Medicine is not a push-button system. Where... 'Oh, you have this symptom, then let's just press on this point.' Sorry no, that's not how it works."

And just as it's easy to slip into this kind of lazy way of thinking about acupuncture, it's also all too easy to slip into this kind of lazy way of applying Traditional Chinese Medical Theory to the practice of Yin Yoga. And I want to say this as gently and with as much compassion as I can. I do realize that Yin Yoga teachers are trying to empower and offer help to their students in their practice, but there's frequently an unintended and somewhat inadvertent kind of reductionism that can occur. And it's usually a case where a teacher links ONE sign or symptom to one organ or meridian.

Examples: "Oh, you have lower back pain? The lower back is ruled by the Kidneys, so you should do a Kidney/Bladder flow."

Or

"Oh, you're stressed and irritated? That's associated with the Liver, so you should do a bunch of Liver and Gall Bladder poses."

Or

"Oh, you have insomnia? Well, that's a Spirit disturbance that is connected to the Heart. Ok, you should do some Heart and Small Intestine poses."

I understand the motivation and good intentions at play here. But this kind of application reduces the nuance and complexity of Traditional Chinese Medicine to a paint-by-numbers, Mickey Mouse, push-button medicine.

So how might we better describe the relationship between Yin Yoga and Chinese Medicine?

I see Yin Yoga as an energy-enhancing practice that very broadly helps promote balance. The phrase I've used for a while is that Yin Yoga provides the mind-body a "homeostatic nudge." The practice gently inclines you towards homeostatic balance. In no way will the average Yin Yogi be manipulating their energy with the same degree of specificity as that of a trained acupuncturist. What we are doing, and this is a good thing to do, is gently providing the system with a nudge towards energetic balance. And on one

level, I hope as practitioners and teachers we can better escape the traps of reductionistic thinking.

But, more broadly, my hope is that in the coming sections where I discuss the basic textures of energy in the body, explore the conduits by which those energies are conducted, and look at the organs that facilitate, store and transport those energies, you'll – in time – gain a more sophisticated and subtle appreciation in all that goes into the holistic approach of Chinese Medicine, and ultimately have ways of communicating that to your students in a way that is clear and empowering.

That's a tall order, I know, but I'm ready to take that challenge with you.

Taoist Origins

What is the Tao, or better – What is Tao?

Over twenty years ago, I remember sitting in an East Asian Studies philosophy class in college where we read the seminal Taoist texts. Back then, I affected a posture of understanding. I'd rub the faint stubble on my chin, smile knowingly, and pretend to comprehend the often inscrutable and frequently paradoxical statements found within these texts.

Take, for example, a few citations from the Tao Te Ching.

*The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things.*

....

*There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
Which existed before Heaven and Earth.
Soundless and formless it depends on nothing and does not
change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger.
It may be considered the mother of the universe.
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.*

....

*All things in the world come from being.
And being comes from non-being.*

—Tao Te Ching

*The Way is to man as rivers and lakes are to fish,
the natural condition of life.*

—Chuang Tzu

Today, I remain somewhat just as befuddled as I was twenty years ago by these enigmatic bits of verse, the only difference being that now, I think I might be a bit more stripped of my smug pretense of comprehension.

If anything, Taoist writings now strike my ear in the same way that Zen koans do. To my logical brain, they often sound nonsensical, shrouded in paradox. But, in a way, they raise a kind of question or contemplation that is meant to open the mind to something beyond its narrowed view of things – a view that is often imprisoned by conceptualization.

I now find the verse of these ancients to be engaging, and, even comforting. They point me, in a way that is difficult to articulate (and probably impossible to succeed at) into the humbling limitations of rational knowledge and into an encounter with the ineffable Mystery that suffuses and embraces all things.

But here, in this section, far from offering an exhaustive exploration of the Taoism and Taoist thought, I hope to tease out some specific themes that were developed by Taoists — themes that became integrated into a medical model that developed into Chinese Medicine.

But, before I go further, I need to issue a caveat of sorts:

Within Taoism (that is, the term that refers to a religious-philosophical tradition that developed out of naturalist schools of philosophy in ancient China), I often find that precision of description and explanation is missing, and that precision is missing for intentional reasons. As the Tao Te Ching proclaims, "The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao," thus rendering any attempt to articulate its meaning doomed to failure from the start. So, rather than mincing words to communicate their understanding, the Taoists favored images, poetry, and metaphor. As Robert Svaboda and Arnie Lade note in their wonderful book, *Tao and Dharma: Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda*, "The terms Tao, Yin and Yang are images fashioned by the ancient Chinese sages to describe their insights into reality. This love of imagery, with a parallel affinity for vagueness and economy of words is reflected in all the classics, and in the Chinese pictographic writing system."

Imagery, affinity for vagueness, and economy of words all implicitly recognize the limitations of conceptualization, itself, and the language that enshrines those concepts.

So, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of language, I shall, nevertheless, spill some proverbial ink here in an effort to shed light on the thought-world that gave rise to the corpus of Chinese Medicine, and how that thought-world can begin to inform one's practice of Yin and Yang yoga.

The word Tao literally translates as "path," but is often rendered more poetically as "the Way." But to limit the Tao simply to the Way, or as a means to something, misses a crucial aspect of the Tao that is eternally, and always, already complete. It follows then that the Tao is both the culmination of a path, as well as the path to that culmination; and, inevitably, the Tao is the inseparable union of the two.

Joseph Kim in his book, *Yin and Yang of Life* describes it like this: "Tao is the beginning and the end, one thing and all things. It is the cause and effect; existence and non-existence; the tangible and the intangible; the concrete and the abstract; what is known and what is unknown; the past, present and future; space, time and what lies beyond. Tao is the principle that guides all things and yet there is nothing fixed about

it. Since the only constant in the universe is change, the only absolute of Tao is that it is always changing."

Said in a slightly different way: the Tao is the source and the path to that source. And it is the source to which all paths return.

Tao: Un-manifest and Manifest

Ok, so how can we translate some of these rather abstruse utterances into ways of approaching our practice and life? A commonly quoted passage from Chapter 42 of the Tao Te Ching is suggestive of how to begin approaching this application:

*"Tao produced the One.
The One produced the two.
The two produced the three.
And the three produced the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry the Yin and embrace the
Yang and through the blending of Qi - they achieve
Harmony."*

—Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42

Here, we have a snapshot of Taoist cosmology.

First: we see how Taoists identified two aspects of the Tao: its un-manifest or formless dimension and its manifest, "visible" dimension in the world of form. From the passage above, the "Tao that produced the One," refers to these two dimensions. The Tao that is spoken of here is the un-manifest Tao. While inaccurate to call it an "it," the un-manifest Tao refers to the Void – or emptiness, or non-active formlessness – and it's from this that all manifestation arises and returns.

Svaboda and Lade explain:

"In the Taoist view, the word Tao is used to denote the all-embracing first principle, the eternal primordial source also called the Void, as well as the potential from which all things arise." (Svaboda and Lade, *Tao and Dharma*).

But The One that the Tao produces is also none other than the Tao, itself, but now refers to its characteristic of primordial Oneness, first manifestation, and/or interconnection of all things – this is the manifest nature of the Tao – as opposed to its Void and Empty quality. This One, is often called the Supreme Ultimate, and is represented by the Tai Ji symbol, also known as the Yin and Yang symbol. This Tai Ji symbol, according to Kim, is meant to convey a "more concrete embodiment of the Tao. It is a "symbol [that] represents the unity, oneness and totality of the universe. It is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. It is the undifferentiated totality." (Kim, *Yin and Yang of Life*)

So we see from the start, that the Tao refers to a primordial emptiness AND fullness, and their inseparable union. As promised, paradox from the very beginning. But hang in there!

The next line of this Chapter 42 of the Tao Te Ching says: "The One produced the two," and this refers to

this supreme totality giving rise to dualistic experience, to an endless dance of complementary oppositions, to a dynamic flow of pairs, otherwise known as Yin and Yang. I'll have much more to say about Yin and Yang in the next section, but for now will simply continue with an explanation of this passage from the Tao Te Ching.

The next line reads: "The two produced the three." Some say that this third element that is now introduced, *i.e.*, the two producing the three, refers to Qi itself. This Qi is a pervasive energy found throughout the manifest cosmos.

Qi refers to a kind of "life force," analogous to Prana (from Indian energetics). But to say that *all* Qi is life force would be incorrect. The Taoists believed that Qi arises from the primordial tension between Yin and Yang in the Universe, and that the entire Universe is pervaded by different qualities, aggregations and textures of Qi.

So in one interpretation, Qi is the 'third' element produced by the complementary polarity of Yin and Yang.

But there are other interpretations of this statement that the "Two produced the Three." For some, this "three" that is produced by the "two" is seen as the "fields of primal activity, referred to as Heaven, Earth and Man." Here we have a basic differentiation of manifestation into Heaven (Yang), Earth (Yin) and Man, occupying a space in between. And from these primary elements – Heaven, Earth and Man – these three gave rise to the 10,000 things... that is, the varied multiplicity of forms in the world.

For newcomers, this can all seem a little confusing, so it's important to highlight and bear in mind the major concerns held by Taoists. Likely of greatest importance, the primary concern of Taoists was harmony and balance with the Tao, itself. The Taoists sought to achieve a harmonious position for Man, a position of balance between Heaven and Earth. The means for attaining this balance comes from cultivating meditative stillness; by stilling the mind, emptying it of its divisive man-made concepts, a direct understanding of Nature is attained, and harmony, balance, and action all spontaneously arise from such insight.

Now this brings up another large theme of concern for Taoists: the relationship between the microcosm (internal world of Man) and the macrocosm or external world. The Taoists were keen observers of Nature. They observed patterns, dynamics, and movements of Nature, not so much with the intent of overcoming or dominating Nature, but rather to live in harmony within these patterns and cycles of Nature.

In their observations of Nature and of themselves, the Taoists developed a view of understanding and relationship between the macrocosm (that is the world out 'there') and the microcosm (that is the internal world of man). They observed how the play of cycles in Nature would manifest in parallel within their internal experience. Understanding and attuning to the world outside facilitated an ability to bring the internal microcosm into harmony with its world, and vice versa, where greater understanding of the microcosm – especially through meditative insight – supported this harmonization with the external environment.

And, as we'll see, this parallel relationship and reciprocation of influence between the microcosm and the macrocosm deeply influenced the Chinese approach to medical diagnosis and treatment.

The scholar, Ronnie Littlejohn, summarizes many of the threads of common concern of the Taoists when he writes:

The Taoists, themselves, "preferred to focus on understanding the nature of reality, increasing their longevity, ordering life morally, practicing rulership, and regulating consciousness and diet." (Littlejohn) This list, with maybe the exception of concerns regarding 'rulership' seems to have much overlap with concerns of yogis, both ancient and modern. Many of these concerns involve issues of how to live a good, flourishing life. And the Taoists used meditation, energetic practices, and diet – among other things – to bring about an inner transformation of understanding and a way to be in harmony with that understanding.

What Are Yin and Yang?

Yin and Yang are ancient Chinese terms used to describe the dynamics of the universe, notably the universal, ceaseless process of change. In modern usage, we might not think of the terms Yin and Yang as referring to change. Normally we think of Yin and Yang as adjectives and labels that categorize certain things as being either Yin in nature or Yang in nature. This is partly true, but it is also somewhat misleading.

The Chinese character for "Yin" literally translates as the "shady side of a hill." Whereas, "Yang" literally translates as the "sunny side of a hill." But these two sides of the hill are never separate, and so it is with Yin and Yang. They are mutually defining, and always coexisting. They are opposite sides of the same coin, as it were. Differentiated, but dependent.

Historically, the terms date back to 200-500 B.C., and are found in the ancient text, the *I Ching*, or the Book of Changes. As its name states, the Book of Changes is a meditation on universal changes that are brought about by the tension between the two forces of Yin and Yang.

Together the composite of Yin and Yang dynamics is depicted by the familiar "Yin and Yang" symbol, also known as the Tai Ji symbol. This symbol of duality and unification, movement and balance, transformation and stability, is a symbol to represent the totality of all existence.

As Joseph Kim observes in his book, *Yin and Yang of Life*: "Yin and Yang are the way in which Tao and Tai Chi play out in nature. Thus, the I Ching describes their relationship by stating "the alternation of yin and yang is called Tao." It also states that, "Tai Chi produces yin and yang; when Tai Chi moves, it becomes yang; when it is still, it becomes yin. All changes in nature occur due to the interaction between these two forces."

"The earliest origin of Yin-Yang phenomena must have derived from the peasants' observation of the cyclical alternation of day and night. Thus Day corresponds to Yang and Night to Yin, and, by extension, Activity to Yang and Rest to Yin. This led to the first observation of the continuous alternation of every phenomenon between two cyclical poles, one corresponding to Light, Sun, Brightness and Activity (Yang), the other corresponding to Darkness, Moon, Shade and Rest (Yin). From this point of view, Yin and Yang are two stages of a cyclical movement, one constantly changing into the other, such as day

giving way to night and vice versa." —Giovanni Maciocia, *Foundations of Chinese Medicine*

Macrocosm and Microcosm

One of the aspects most central to Taoism was the tendency of Taoists to observe patterns in Nature. Through their refined observations, they concluded that the dynamics they observed in Nature, also existed within the human body. There was, in other words, a direct parallel as well as an interrelationship between the macrocosm (universe) and the microcosm (signified by man). And this became part of the foundational principle of Chinese Medicine.

For the Taoists, their interest in observing nature lay in their intention to be in harmony with Nature, not to overcome or control Nature. And the same goes for Chinese Medicine. The intention behind a skillful Chinese Medical doctor is to promote harmony among the various dynamics in the human organism. And to bring that human organism into harmony with its environment.

And so, in observing Yin and Yang dynamics both in the macrocosm and within the microcosm, the overarching intention was always one of promoting harmony. When honored, observed and respected, Yin and Yang describe processes of change that can be fluid, harmonious and balanced. Of course, if neglected or disregarded, the ceaseless process of change between Yin and Yang can break down and no longer be a smooth, harmonizing process of balance, but rather turn into a disruptive, chaotic and jarring dynamic of imbalance.

The *raison d'être* for pursuing knowledge of things Yin and Yang is to aid and support the former, and avoid and minimize the latter.

As we will see when we look more closely at the relationship between Yin and Yang, they are in a constant process of change, ceaselessly transforming into the other. For example, day becomes night, night becomes day. Summer becomes Fall, which becomes Winter, etc. The singular constant of the Universe is the unwavering ceaselessness of change, itself.

When we look at Yin and Yang more closely, it's very important to bear in mind two essential aspects of their relationship.

1. Yin and Yang are terms that are used to describe *relationships* in nature. Yin and Yang are not fixed or absolute qualities. They are fluid, dynamic terms, and their designation can change depending on the context they are being used in. For example, Yin Yoga is a slower form of yoga compared to Ashtanga Yoga which would be considered "Yang" in nature. But if we were to compare Yin Yoga to an even slower form of yoga, such as Yoga Nidra, Yin Yoga would be relatively more Yang in nature compared to Yoga Nidra, which would be more Yin.
2. Also, whenever Yin and Yang are used to describe a particular relationship, they are used with reference to a specific characteristic or trait being evaluated in that relationship. So if we think back to the sunny and shady side of a hill, the two sides of the hill are being compared with reference to the quality of "light." Lighter and brighter, *i.e.* sunnier, things tend to be more "Yang" in nature, whereas darker, more hidden, *i.e.* shadier, things tend to be more Yin. Or if we consider the example given above – comparing Yin Yoga to other forms of Yoga, like Ashtanga and Yoga Nidra – the trait that is being evaluated is the quality of movement or relative stillness.

In general, over the centuries, there has been a consensual agreement that Yin refers to phenomena that tends to include: Static, dark, cold, thick, turbid, dense, invisible, rigid, passive, yielding, still, nourishing. And the consensual agreement around phenomena that are Yang tends to include: Mobile, light, hot, thin, clear, sparse, visible, flexible, active, moving, protecting.

But Yin and Yang designations in one dynamic can change when the trait that is being evaluated changes. Consider your breast bone and your heart. If we evaluate their relationship with the trait of movement, where Yang things tend to move more dynamically, then the Heart is more "Yang" relative to the immobility of the breast bone. But if we change the trait within this comparison and evaluate the heart and breast bone in terms of location, where Yang things tend to be more on the surface, and Yin things tend to be more hidden, then their designations flip. The breast bone becomes Yang, and the heart is Yin.

The basic idea is that these terms are never fixed or absolute. So it's important to not be too rigid in their application.

Now that we understand that Yin and Yang refer to complementary oppositional forces, energies and dynamics in nature, it's time to look more closely at several different aspects of their relationship, namely their: 1) Mutual Opposition, 2) Mutual Dependence, 3) Mutual Consumption and Support, and 4) Mutual Transformation.

A more comprehensive understanding of Yin and Yang Theory will help the yogi to better integrate Yin and Yang yoga practices into their life, with sensitivity to the greater dynamics of that yogi's life, their stage in life, their constitutional temperament, as well as environmental considerations.

Yin and Yang: Mastering the Relationship

Simplicity to Complexity

While Yin/Yang Theory is a remarkably simple model for analyzing dynamics and relationships between things in the world, it's deceptive simplicity is able to embrace and illuminate a dazzling array of complexity in the natural order. And there are several aspects of the relationship between Yin and Yang which help bear out it's descriptive power for capturing Life's complexity.

We'll now look at four aspects of the relationship between Yin and Yang in greater depth.

1. The Opposition of Yin and Yang

Everything in the Universe can be seen in relationship to its opposite, or counterpart. "All phenomena in the universe can be seen as either yin or yang. For example, phenomena are either positive or negative, male or female, up or down, open or closed, outside or inside day or night, acid or alkaline, loved or hated, joyful or sad, etc." writes Joseph Kim (Yin and Yang of Life).

But Maciocia cautions us to remember that, "The opposition is relative, not absolute, in so far as nothing is totally Yin or totally Yang. Everything contains the seed of its opposite. Moreover, the opposition of Yin-Yang is relative as the Yin or Yang quality of something is not really intrinsic, but only relative to

something else. Thus, strictly speaking, it is wrong to say that something "is Yang" or "is Yin." Everything only pertains to Yin or Yang in relationship to something else. For example, hot pertains to Yang and cold pertains to Yin, so we might say that the climate in Naples is Yang in relation to Stockholm, but (Naples) is Yin in relation to that of Algiers." (*Foundations of Chinese Medicine*)

So again, we might designate Yin Yoga as being "yin" in relation to more dynamic styles that are more "yang." But if we compared Crossfit to Ashtanga Yoga, Ashtanga becomes relatively Yin in relationship to the extreme Yang dynamism of Crossfit.

2. Mutual Dependence, or Interdependence of Yin and Yang

The next aspect of the relationship between Yin and Yang is really a continuation of the acknowledgment that Yin and Yang are in opposition to each other. Although they exist in opposition, their very status is dependent on the other.

For example, day is opposite to night, but the existence of day is dependent on night, and vice versa. Similarly, activity (Yang) is the opposite of rest (Yin), but there can't be rest without activity, nor can there be activity without rest.

As Kim states: "This means that nothing can exist without its opposite and everything is defined by its opposite. For example, there is no front without a back, top without a bottom, inside without an outside."

In the above examples the dependent relationship is direct, in the sense that night is directly dependent on day. But the relationship of dependence can also be indirect, whereby, "animals (yang) depend on plants (yin) for oxygen and plants depend on animals for carbon dioxide." (Kim)

In Buddhism, as we'll see, this concept of Mutual Dependence is somewhat similar to the Buddha's teaching on Dependent Origination, which although rather complex, can be simply summarized by the following: nothing arises independently in the world; everything arises (exists) dependent on something else; *i.e.* this arises because of that; that arises because of this.

In yoga, this facet of mutual dependence shows up in some basic ways: Taking an in-breath is dependent on taking an out-breath, *savasana* (stillness) is predicated on some kind of prior movement (activity); flexion is dependent on extension; contraction is dependent on expansion; we flex our muscles, which is dependent on our ability to relax our muscles. The concept of Yin Yoga makes sense only in relationship to Yang Yoga.

Every phenomena is both in opposition to something else, and simultaneously dependent on that opposition for its definition, ever and ever.

3. Mutual Consumption

The third aspect of the relationship between Yin and Yang reminds us of their changing dynamic. In their dependent nature, Yin and Yang rely on the other for identity and definition, but now we will start to see how Yin and Yang affect each other. Here, their relationship is established along a tension of mutual control or consumption, whereby one element balances or holds the other in check. A point that many authors and practitioners of Chinese Medicine often reiterate is that as qualities of change, Yin and Yang

are in a constant process of controlling and balancing. A static, unchanging balance is never achieved. What is observed and assisted, however – both by the skilled yoga practitioner and practitioner of Chinese Medicine – is a process of balancing.

In healthy dynamics, this aspect of their relationship is both gentle and mutually supportive, similar to the way two people dancing together might take turns leading their partner in the dance. With the examples we've used so far, activity is gently tempered by rest and rest gently informed by activity. The coolness and inwardness of night balances and controls the heat and outwardness of day, and vice versa. If we consider elements of nature (see the section on Five Element Theory), the element of Water is in a Yin/Yang relationship with Fire. Water cools and controls the heat of Fire. Similarly, Fire controls and balances the coolness of Water. Psychologically, receptivity (Yin) balances and controls aggressive influence (Yang), and assertive mental qualities (Yang) balance and control tendencies to be too passive or non-engaging (Yin).

At other times, this dynamic of mutual control can become pathological and create all sorts of dysfunctional imbalances.

And in pathology, this is where the relationship of control can become a little more complicated.

If one side of the dynamic becomes either excessive or weak relative to the other sides of the relationship, and if that imbalance persists for enough time, it will lead to unhealthy imbalances. And there are four ways that this Controlling aspect of their relationship can manifest:

- I. Preponderance of Yin (Excess Yin)
- II. Preponderance of Yang (Excess Yang)
- III. Weakness of Yin (Deficient Yin)
- IV. Weakness of Yang (Deficient Yang)

On the face of it, Excess Yin might sound like Deficient Yang, and Excess Yang might sound like Deficient Yin, but there differences between these that need mentioning.

In the first two instances, there are what Chinese Medical practitioners call a 'true' excess of either Yin or Yang. In these cases, either the Yin or Yang is excessive in relationship to the other. It's helpful to consider this pattern in relationship to 'full' Cold (Yin) and 'full' Heat (Yang) manifestations. And in this dynamic, when Yin becomes dominant it consumes Yang. When Yang becomes dominant it consumes Yin.

For example, when Cold predominates over Heat in the body, a person will feel the some or all of the following symptoms: Chilliness, cold limbs, abdominal pain which is made worse when pressed upon, a desire to drink warm beverages, clear and abundant urine, and loose stools. The reason that the person would feel abdominal pain is that Cold slows down and obstructs the flow of Qi (energy) which causes pain. But all these symptoms arise because Cold is controlling Heat in the body.

In contrast, when Heat predominates over Cold in the body, a person will feel some or all of the following symptoms: Thirst for cold beverages, fever, red complexion, constipation (heat drying out the Fluids to moisten the Intestines), and dark/scanty urine.

In both these instances, Yin or Yang dominates the other of the pair, much like a dominant partner in a relationship, where an aggressive husband (Yang) might order about his partner. Or an excessively shy partner (Yin) might inhibit the socialization of the couple. And the treatment in these cases is to clear or attenuate the dominant element of the pair, either by clearing the excess Heat, warming and dispersing the excess Cold.

In the second two categories of relationship, Yin (Cold) and Yang (Heat) are deficient in relationship to the other which gives the appearance of the other being more excessive, when really the imbalance is created by a relative weakness of one side of the polarity, not by an excess. For example, if Yin is weak, Yang will appear excessive, and in Chinese Medicine this is called Empty Heat (Yang). There are Heat symptoms, but they arise due to a relative weakness of Cold, not because of an excess of Heat. Symptoms of Empty Heat include: red flush in the cheeks, feeling of heat primarily in afternoon or evening (Yin time of day), low-grade fever especially in afternoon, waking during night, sweating especially at night.

Likewise, when Yang (Hot) is weak relative to Yin (Cold), there is a dynamic whereby Yin becomes relatively stronger than Yang, but only because of the Yang weakness/deficiency. This is called Empty Cold (Yin) and symptoms include: Chilliness (but not the same intensity as Full Cold), no thirst, low energy, sweating, loose stools, clear and abundant urination.

With these two patterns where Yin or Yang are relatively weaker to the other, giving false signs of excess in the other, the treatment strategy is different. With False Heat, the treatment is to nourish Yin (not clear Heat), and with False Cold, the treatment would be to nourish Yang (not clear Cold).

This relationship of how Yin and Yang affect and/or control one another becomes very relevant when we start to think about how to apply various styles of Yoga to bring balance to our lives and health.

A few years ago, I treated a few men with acupuncture for symptoms of waking up at night with sweating and restlessness. These symptoms are not common for men in their thirties. They are common symptoms for women going through menopause, however. And menopause is a phase in women's lives when Yin becomes relatively weak in relationship to Yang, creating the pattern of Empty Heat (Yang). If you look back at that pattern, you'll see that many of the Empty Heat symptoms fit typical presentations of menopause. But why were these otherwise healthy men experiencing Empty Heat symptoms? The answer emerged during the intake, whereby I learned that they were practicing Bikram Yoga with a rather strenuous zeal, attending classes at least "six times a week" and "sometimes even twice a day." Had they experienced the sleep disturbance, insomnia and night sweating prior to this dedication to Bikram Yoga? No.

Now, this is not a rant or a diss against Bikram Yoga. But, Bikram Yoga is a practice where Heat is predominant. And the practice causes lots of sweating (which is a loss of Yin). So from a Chinese Medical perspective, the Heat from the frequent Bikram classes literally 'cooks' the fluids (Yin) of the body creating a condition of Empty Heat, whereby the Yin energy becomes weaker relative to Yang, and the Yin is no longer able to keep the Yang in control. So at night, which is the Yin time of day, the Yin is insufficient to keep Yang in balance, and Yang Heat is able to rise more, causing Heat symptoms.

As part of their treatment, in addition to nourishing Yin and Fluids in their body, I encouraged them to add some Yin Yoga classes, cut back on the Bikram to a few times a week, and within a month or so, their

insomnia and night sweating had resolved.

So in considering how we adapt our yoga practices to our life, it helps to have a more nuanced understanding of Yin and Yang energies and how they affect one another. These considerations help us better apply different disciplines in our practice.

4. Mutual Transformation

As the Tai Ji symbol suggests, when the *dark side* of Yin reaches its fullest potential it changes into a phase of Yang. And when the *light side* of Yang attains its greatest peak, it crests and yields to a phase of Yin. Joseph Kim describes it like this: Yin and Yang, "transform into each other, defining their relationship as one of conservation and exchange. The transformation of yin into yang and yang into yin allows the energetic cycle to continue moving forward."

With mindful attention given to our practice and how we respond to our practice, we will be in a better position to assist this transformation, promoting *harmonious* transformation. With a mindful eye on this process, we can facilitate smooth transitions in our daily cycle, as well as through the seasons, alternating between Yin and Yang dynamics.

In exercise, we can consider the transformational process in terms of how our tissues respond to different exercises. With Yang stresses to the muscles – short, dynamic, active – the muscles become firmer, stronger, and stiffer (more Yin). With Yin stresses – gentle, long, mild – to the dense connective tissues at the joints, these tissues become stronger, but also a bit more hydrated and mobile (Yang). Each form of exercise attracts or transforms into the opposite quality.

What is Qi?

Introduction to Qi

The concept of Qi (pronounced 'chee') is a very challenging concept from Chinese philosophy and Chinese Medicine to parse in Western terms. Frequently, Qi is translated to refer to something like energy, life force or, *prana*. And, while this is to some degree accurate, it is also not the complete picture. As one Chinese Medical classic puts it: "The ancient Chinese perceived the existence of Qi and believed it to be the basic substance by which all movements and mutations of all phenomena in the universe arise."

In other words, everything within the universe possesses some form of Qi, independent of whether or not those entities possess life. Stars, asteroids, black holes, oceans, mountains, plants, birds, etc. all possess a kind of Qi in one form or another.

To this end, many hard-line Chinese Medical theorists insist that the term has no English, or Western equivalence. The concept of Qi is one that resists translation or reduction. On one level, the broad concept of Qi includes embraces living and non-living phenomena.

Similarly, there's a way in which the term signifies something that is simultaneously material and immaterial. In fact the Chinese character for Qi suggests its elusive nature. Part of the Chinese character for Qi signifies "vapor," "steam," or "gas," hinting at an immaterial nature. That said, the second part of the Chinese character for Qi is represents "uncooked rice," suggesting a denser, more material form. As a

compound character, one might interpret it to mean the steam that is produced by the transformation of uncooked rice into cooked (and digestible) rice. And as we'll see, the relationship between cooking food and the production of Qi in the body is foundational to the Chinese conception of nourishing and strengthening one's Qi.

For now, suffice it so say, Qi – in its broadest sense – is a concept that resists translation. And part of the reason Qi is so difficult to translate is due to its dynamic, non-fixed nature. Maciocia states: "The reason it is so difficult to translate the word, "Qi" correctly, lies precisely in its fluid nature whereby Qi can assume different manifestations and be different things in different situations." (Maciocia: *Foundations of Chinese Medicine*)

Qi Within the Body: Health and Disease

That being said, within a human life form, we can refer to Qi's manifestation as a kind of energetic life force that is the essential element for the sustenance of life. Or in other words, life, and in particular human life, is a particular aggregation or condensation of Qi. Wang Chong (AD 27-97) a Taoist philosopher wrote: "Qi produces the human body just as water becomes ice. As water freezes into ice, so Qi coagulates to form the human body. When ice melts, it becomes water. When a person dies, he or she becomes spirit [*shen*] again. It is called spirit, just as melted ice changes its name to water."

While in the aggregate of a human form, the Taoists were keenly interested in cultivating and optimizing the state of their Qi. And this is where Taoists share similar to concerns with ancient and modern Yogis. To borrow a phrase from the yogini, Sarah Powers, yoga can be viewed as a "Qi-enhancement discipline." Through intentional exercises of body, breath and mind (*i.e.* Yoga and meditation), and in conjunction with dietary and other lifestyle practices, one can enhance and optimize the quality, flow, texture and function of one's Qi. To a large extent, this is the overlapping domain of interest of both yogis and Taoists.

Two Broad Patterns of Qi: Deficiency and Stagnation

For this introductory discussion of Qi, it's important to consider two broad patterns of Qi disharmony – patterns that when they occur lead to disease, imbalance, and disharmony. These two patterns are often called **Qi Deficiency** and **Qi Stagnation**. It's important to note: There exist many other patterns of disharmony, but for now, it's a good idea to get a handle of the basic concepts of Qi Deficiency and Qi Stagnation.

As the names suggest, Qi Deficiency is an issue of insufficient Qi, sometimes referred to as a Qi Vacuity. And Qi Stagnation is a problem of blocked and stuck Qi.

Both of these patterns can manifest on the local level in a specific area of the body – with Deficient Qi of the digestive process, or Stagnant Qi in a joint (causing pain) – or these patterns can manifest more on the global level, whereby there would be more pervasive, systematic presentations of Deficiency or Stagnation.

Generally, Deficient Qi symptoms include: fatigue, loose stools, poor appetite, dizziness, pale face, weak voice and/or a reluctance to speak, sweating with little to no exertion, tendency to catch colds easily. Wiseman and Ellis write: "Qi deficiency denotes a group of diseases caused by a vacuity of original Qi. The deficiency may be caused by enduring illness, old age, weak constitution, malnutrition, or taxation

fatigue." (Wiseman and Ellis: *Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine*)

In contrast, the main symptoms associated with Stagnant Qi are: Distention and/or pressure, aches and pains that may or may not move around, depression, irritability, and anger. Wiseman and Ellis again write: "Under normal circumstances, Qi flows smoothly and freely through the whole body. If the Qi dynamic is disturbed in any part, the resultant disorder in the relevant organ or channel is known as Qi stagnation. Emotional constraint, dietary irregularities, contraction of external evils and external injury are all potential factors of Qi dynamic disturbance." (*Foundations of Chinese Medicine*) For many, particularly in the West, stress is an underlying contributory factor in the development of Qi Stagnation.

With these patterns in mind, it's helpful to consider how different yoga practices influence the state of each pattern of Qi. Drawn from observations in my own practice, as well as from the practice of friends and students, and from my clinical experience as an acupuncturist, it seems to me that Deficient Qi patterns benefit greatly from both Restorative and Yin Yoga styles. These styles gently stimulate the meridian system and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting a restoration of Deficient Qi. Neither practice requires a great expenditure of Qi to engage them, and so they allow the body to focus on replenishing itself and making up the deficiency of Qi.

For more stagnant patterns, the styles of active and dynamic yoga (*i.e.* Yang yoga) are frequently more indicated. The movement and flowing dynamics of Yang yoga pump and flood Qi through the regions that are Stagnant, helping to restore a natural free-flow of Qi in the body as a whole. That said, it's also quite true that Yin Yoga, with its emphasis on targeting Qi flow in the joints, also helps to remove Stagnant Qi imbalances. In fact, many forms of Stagnant Qi occur specifically at the joint sites, which suggests how a combination of Yin and Yang Yoga is so effective at restoring and promoting an optimization of Qi quality and flow. Yin Yoga clears out the deep obstructions in the meridians; Yang Yoga pumps higher quality Qi and Blood through these unobstructed meridians.

I'd like to conclude this introduction to Qi with a general sense of the concept of Qi, and there is no better description of this than from Ted Kaptchuk's classic, *The Web That Has No Weaver*:

"The notion of Qi is as fundamental to Chinese culture and medical thought as Yin and Yang. Like these polar complementary opposites, no one English word or phrase can adequately capture Qi's meaning. One can say that, for the Chinese, everything in the universe, inorganic and organic, is composed of and defined by its Qi. Mountains, plants, and human emotions all have Qi. Qi is not so much a force added to lifeless matter but the state of being of any phenomena. For the Chinese, Qi is the pulsation of the cosmos itself.

"Everything in the universe is composed of and defined by its Qi. Chinese thought does not distinguish between matter and energy, but we can think of Qi as matter on the verge of becoming energy at the point of materializing. It is perceived functionally, by what it does. Like electricity, it flows in a current."

That last line: Qi is "perceived functionally, by what it does," is critical to remember. Entities in Chinese Medicine are almost unanimously "perceived functionally." Entities defined by what they do, and we'll see this affirmed again and again when we look at the meridian system; meridians are defined by what they do, functionally; the organ system – organs are defined by what they do, functionally; and the Vital

Substances of the body – which again are defined by what they do, functionally for the whole organism.

What Are Meridians?

While Qi is the "organizing force" of the body as Dr. Daniel Keown notes in *The Spark in the Machine*, the Channels are the communicative network within which the signals of that "organizing force" are propagated, conveyed, and directed. In this light, one way of thinking of the Meridians of Chinese Medicine is that they are, generally speaking, channels of communication within the organism along which subtle informational signals are transmitted.

For many years, Western researchers have been dismissive of the existence of Chinese Meridians – as well as of Qi for that matter – simply because whenever they dissected cadavers they would fail to find the "so-called" Meridians as detailed in the Chinese Medical manuals. But things are beginning to change in this regard. More recently, researchers who focus on the Connective Tissue and Fascia of the body – people like Dr. Helene Langevin and Dr. James Oschmann – postulate that the Meridians are embedded in planes of connective tissue. As we'll see when we look more closely at Connective Tissue, collagen and water are the main constituents of Connective Tissue. Collagen is capable of generating and conducting bioelectric signals, and water is quite good at conducting these electrical signals. Dr. Daniel Keown, refers to this bio-electricity as 'elecQicity'. In other words, these subtle currents of electricity traveling through the body are a kind of Qi. I won't go so far as to say all Qi is electrical, but it's certainly likely that the Qi flowing through the Meridians is.

"The sensation that patients often describe when having Acupuncture is one of an electrical sensation, especially in the limbs. Some points especially create a sensation of tingling or electricity propagating down the limbs. Studies have shown that Acupuncture points conduct electricity better than surrounding skin; that Acupuncture channels conduct electricity better than surrounding tissue; and that channels and points are found in the fascia.... Collagen is the principal ingredient of the fascia and collagen has both unusual conducting properties and also generates electricity. Most importantly, the fluid between the fascial planes conducts electricity very well. This fluid is free of any mechanical obstructions... in health." (*The Spark in the Machine*, Dr. Daniel Keown)

Types and Locations of Meridians

The word Meridian is a translation for the Chinese term *jing-luo*. Jing means to "go through." And luo means "something that connects." Loosely, if we put these together, the *jing-luo* are a channels of energy that go through and connect.

An ancient medical text, the Nei Jing, states: "The Meridians move the Qi and Blood, regulate the Yin and the Yang, moisten the tendons and the Bones, and benefit the joints... internally the Meridians connect with the Organs and externally with the joints, limbs and the outer surface of the body."

It's important to emphasize that the Chinese model of the Meridians is not necessarily reducible to Western anatomical structures. And many Chinese Medical practitioners resist this kind of reductionism. They insist the Meridians are not blood vessels, nor are they nerve pathways.

Ted Kaptchuk puts it well in his book, *The Web That Has No Weaver*: "They comprise an invisible lattice

that links together all the fundamental textures [energies] and Organs. In Chinese Medicine theory, these channels are unseen but are thought to embody a kind of informational network - the Qi and Blood move along them, and a therapeutic system is conceptually organized through the details of its design. Because the Meridian system unifies all the parts of the body, it is essential for the maintenance of harmonious balance." That said, I, personally, am intrigued and sympathetic to the speculative relationship between Meridians and Connective Tissue structures.

Chinese Medicine refers to many different kinds of Meridians, but in general two are addressed most frequently in therapeutic interventions. They are called the **12 Main Channels** and the **8 Extraordinary Vessels**.

The Twelve Main Channels

The 12 Regular Meridians correspond to the **five Yin Organs** and **six Yang Organs** of the body. In Meridian theory, the Pericardium, an organ, is treated as an independent Organ with its own Meridian, but in clinical application and in Five Element Theory, the Pericardium is subsumed under the roll of the Heart, which is why it is not granted its own status as an independent Yin Organ.

One of the main functions of Meridian network of the 12 Main Channels is to form an interlinking union of connectivity through which Qi and Blood is able to flow through the entirety of the body. These 12 Regular Meridians nourish their corresponding Organs, enabling these Organs to carry out their roles for physiological and psychological health, and conduct the energy and Vital Substances produced by the Organs to various other parts of the body.

Breakdown of the 12 Regular Meridians

- 6 Meridians are focused in the upper body, 6 focused in the lower body.
- 6 Meridians are connected to and nourish the Yin organs, and 6 are connected to and nourish the Yang organs.

These Meridians can be classified by location

- Upper: Lung (Yin), Large Intestine (Yang), Pericardium (Yin), Triple Burner (Yang), Heart (Yin), Small Intestine (Yang)
- Lower: Kidney (Yin), Bladder (Yang), Liver (Yin), Gall Bladder (Yang), Spleen (Yin), Stomach (Yang)

The Eight Extraordinary Vessels

The 8 Extraordinary Vessels are deeper within the body and serve as reservoirs for Qi and Blood. They receive surplus Qi and Blood from the 12 Regular Channels, and also, in turn, nourish the 12 Regular Channels if they become deficient in Qi and Blood.

"While the Regular Meridians are perceived as subtle thread-like pathways, the Extraordinary Vessels are considered broad receptacles of Qi. Furthermore, the Extraordinary Vessels are considered a primary force in embryological development, being responsible for the organization of the embryonic terrain and early life's structural development." (Svaboda and Arnie, *Tao and Dharma*).

Two of the Extraordinary Vessels, the Governing (Du) and Conception (Ren) Vessel have their own

acupuncture points, through which their energetics are manipulated, but the remaining six Vessels are accessed through acupuncture points on the Regular Channels.

Meridians and Our Yoga Practice

Clearing the irrigation system and nourishing the field. The ancient masters of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture have long recognized that the state of a person's health is determined by the quality and flow of their Qi throughout their body. The Meridian system serves, to some degree, as an irrigation network of Qi. If that irrigation system is clogged or blocked or if there is insufficient Qi circulating through the irrigation system, then disharmonies of health arise.

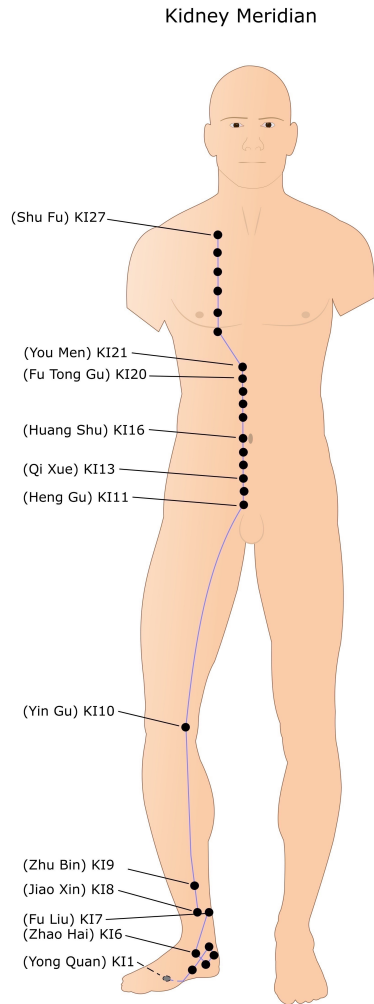
Yoga, Yin and Yang, along with breathing exercises, is a wonderful way of maintaining the health of our Meridian and Organ system. Stimulating the fascia within postures will both generate electric Qi propagation, but also clear obstructions that block the free-flow of that Qi throughout the body. The result of a dedicated yoga practice is that one's Qi is both nourished and circulated evenly and harmoniously throughout the 'field' of the human body, so that the crop of good health and well-being emerges organically and naturally.

Functions of the Meridians

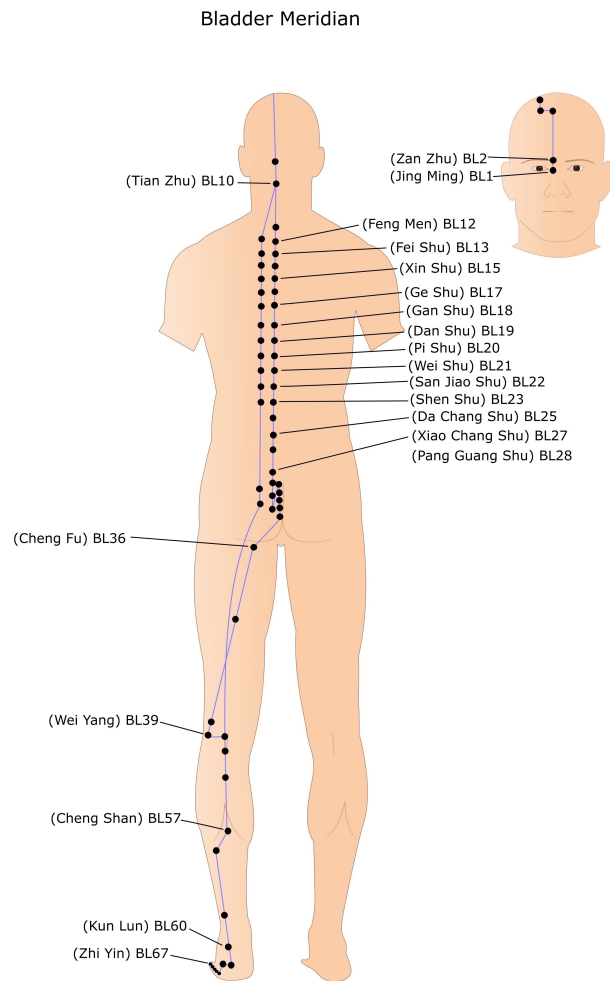
1. **Moves the Qi and Blood:** The circulation of Qi and Blood happens within the meridians; if the meridians are blocked, this circulation will stagnate and disharmonies will develop.
2. **Moistens the tendons and bones:** The meridians nourish the tendons and bones so that they don't "dry" out and become weak and brittle.
3. **Benefits the joints:** Nourishing the joints with blood, the meridians also prevent evil "Qi" from settling into the joints.
4. **Connects the interior of the body with the exterior:** The meridians form a body-wide communication network connecting every aspect of the body to every other aspect (think fascia).
5. **Nourishes the internal organs:** The meridians provide the organs with adequate Qi and Blood so each organ can operate effectively.

Maps of the Twelve Main Meridians

Kidney Meridian (Yin)



Bladder Meridian (Yang)

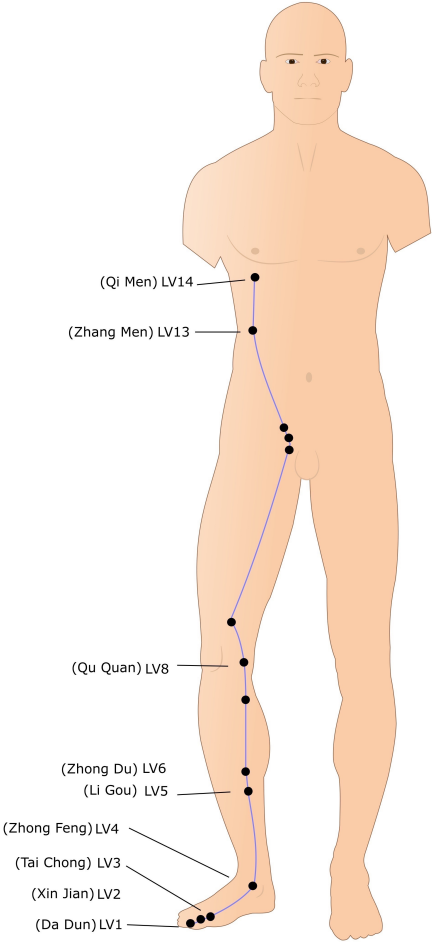


Symptoms of Kidney/Bladder imbalance:

Pain and soreness in lower back and knees; deafness, tinnitus; loss of head hair; infertility, impotence; growth disorders, developmental delays; frequent urination; edema; chronic fears and phobias.

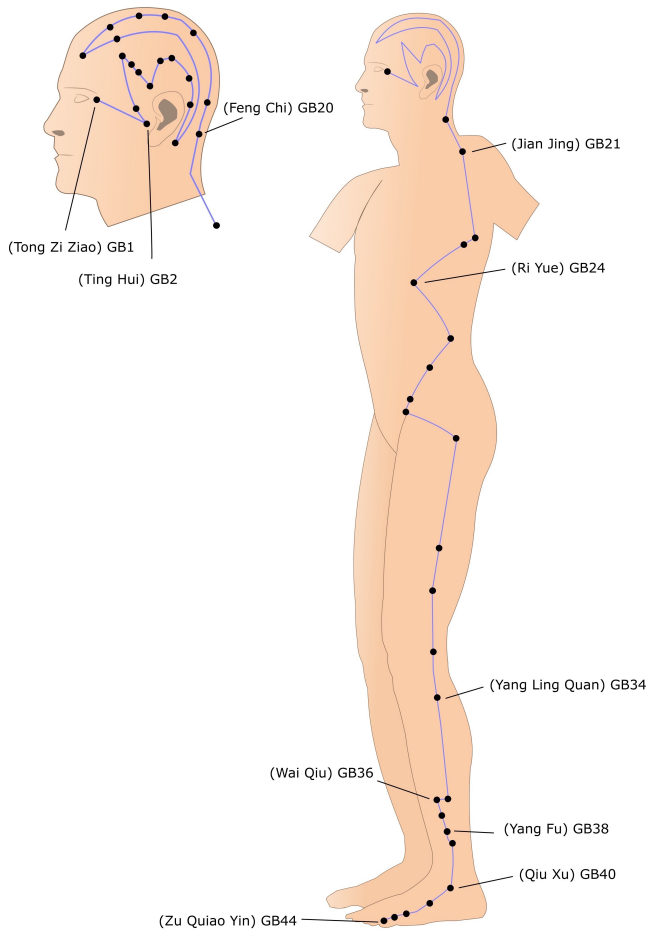
Liver Meridian (Yin)

Liver Meridian



Gall Bladder Meridian (Yang)

Gall Bladder Meridian

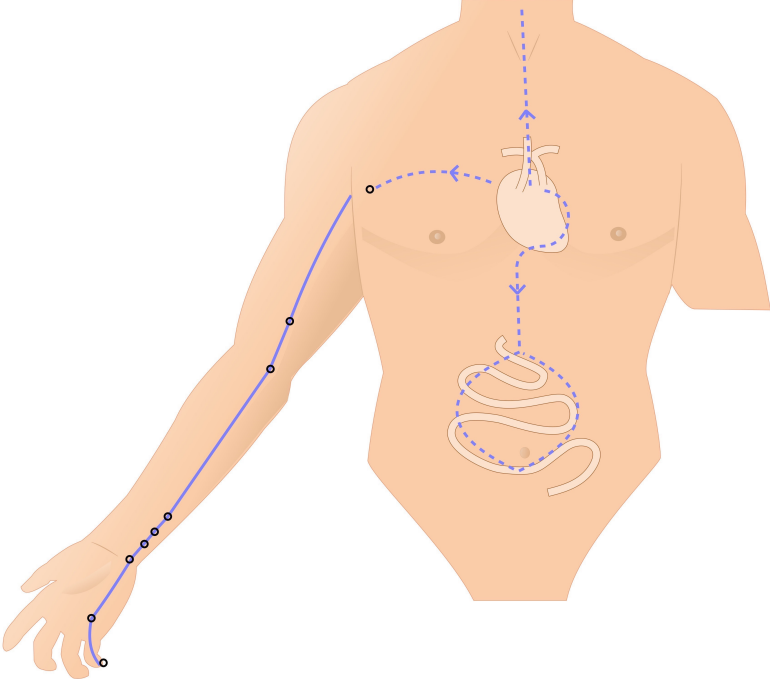


Symptoms of Liver/Gall Bladder imbalance:

Irritability; pain under the ribs; bitter taste in mouth; irregular menses; cracked, brittle, discolored nails; problems with vision; pains that migrate through body; chronic stress; tension, cramps, or spasms in muscles.

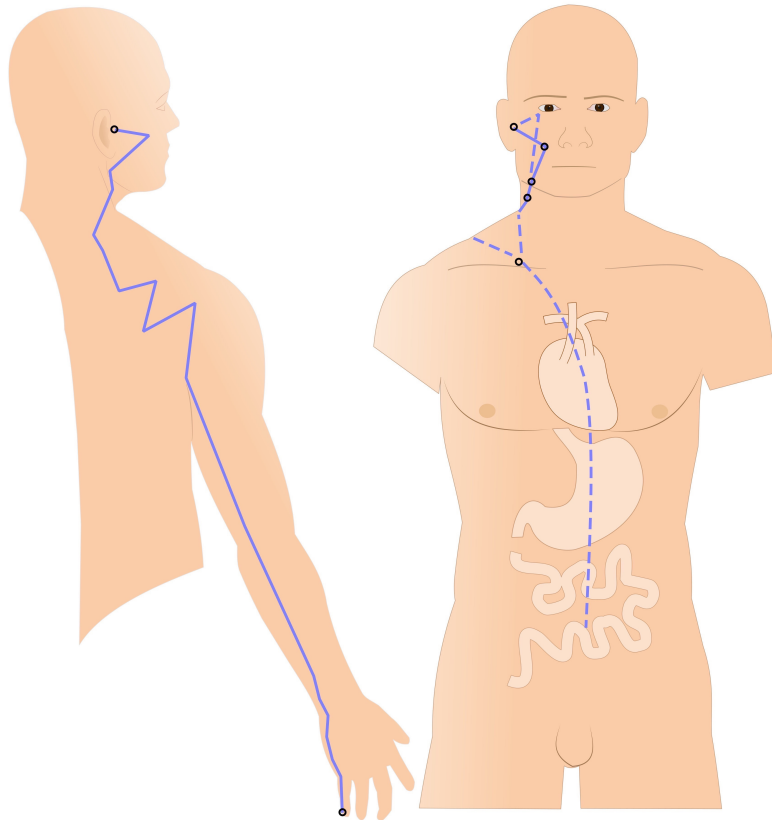
Heart Meridian (Yin)

Heart meridian and inner branch



Small Intestine Meridian (Yang)

Small Intestine meridian (Tai Yang) and its inner branches



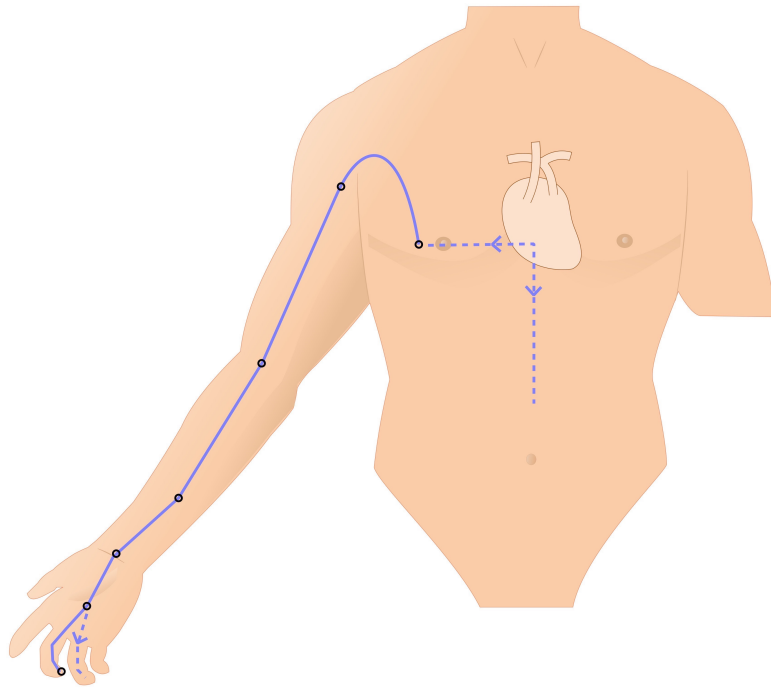
Symptoms of Heart and Small Intestine imbalance:

Irregular pulse; pain in chest; disturbances in speech; odd affect or emotional expression; insomnia, sleep disturbances; manic behavior; excessive giddiness, restlessness.

***The Pericardium (Yin) and the Triple Burner (San Jiao) (Yang) are a pair of meridians that are part of 12 Main Meridians, but closely associated with the Heart and Small Intestine.

Pericardium Meridian (Yin)

Pericardium meridian and inner branch

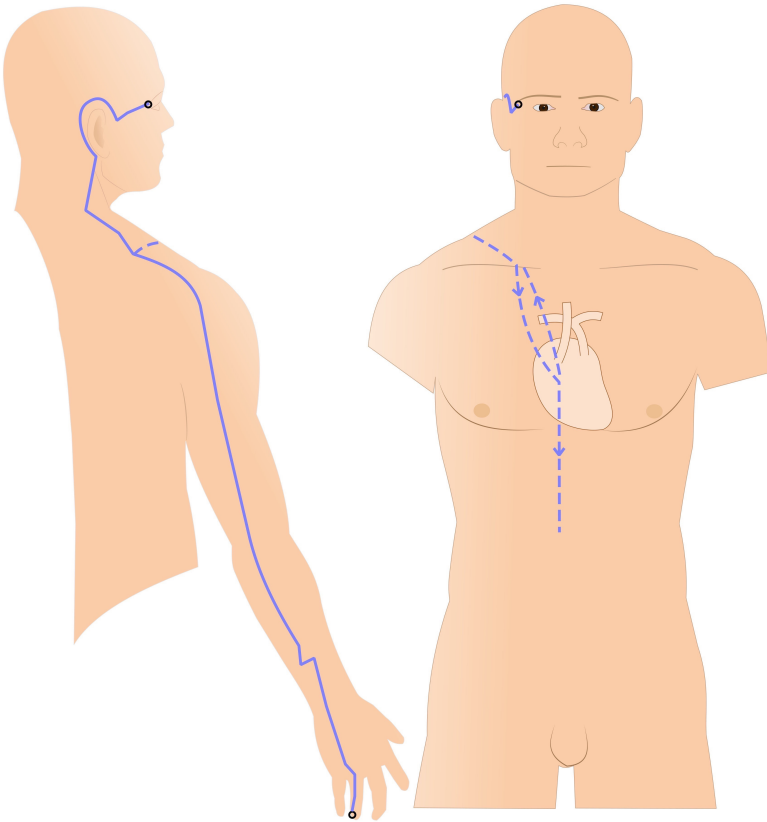


Symptoms of Pericardium imbalance:

Mental/emotional disturbances; anxiety. Similar symptoms to Heart imbalance.

Triple Burner Meridian (Yang)

San Jiao meridian (Shao Yang) and its inner branches

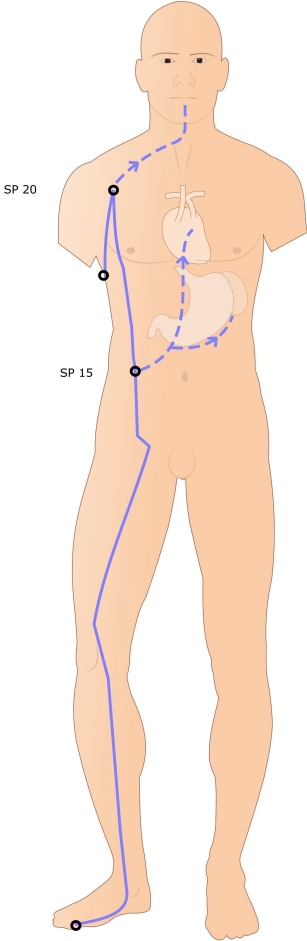


Symptoms of Triple Burner:

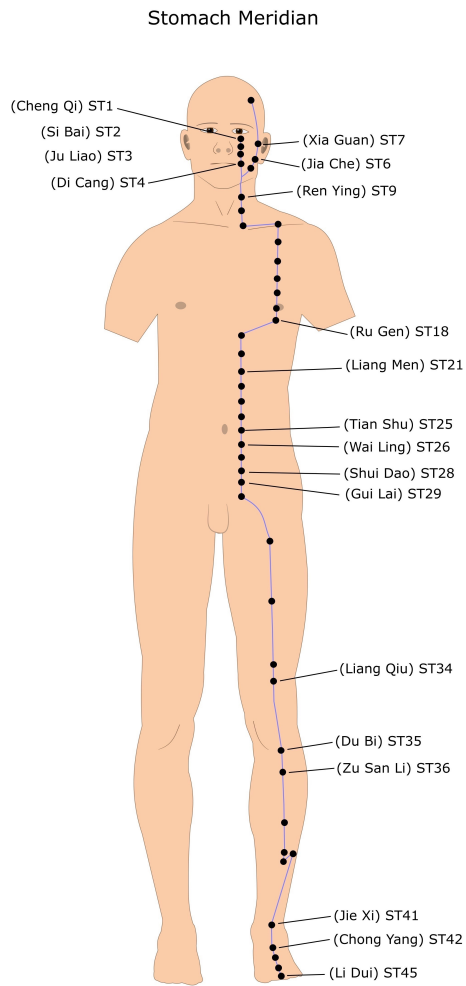
Disruption in fluid distribution throughout body; excessive mucus build-up; sneezing/coughing with phlegm; poor digestion with abdominal distention; accumulation of fluid; urinary difficulty.

Spleen Meridian (Yin)

Spleen meridian (Tai Yin) and its inner branches



Stomach Meridian (Yang)

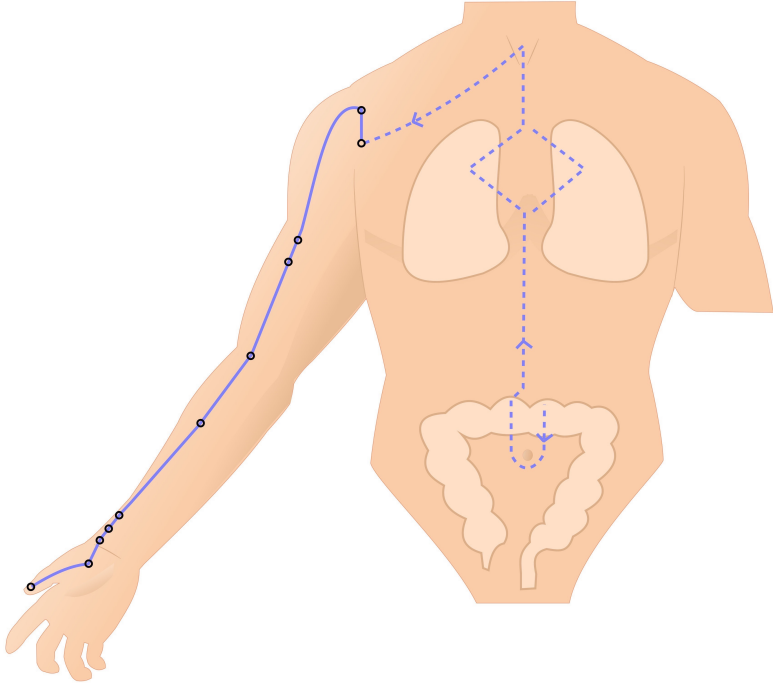


Symptoms of Spleen and Stomach imbalances:

Poor digestion, gas, and/or bloating; poor appetite; low energy; heavy limbs; bruising; chronic loose bowels; bleeding disorders; excessive rumination or worrying.

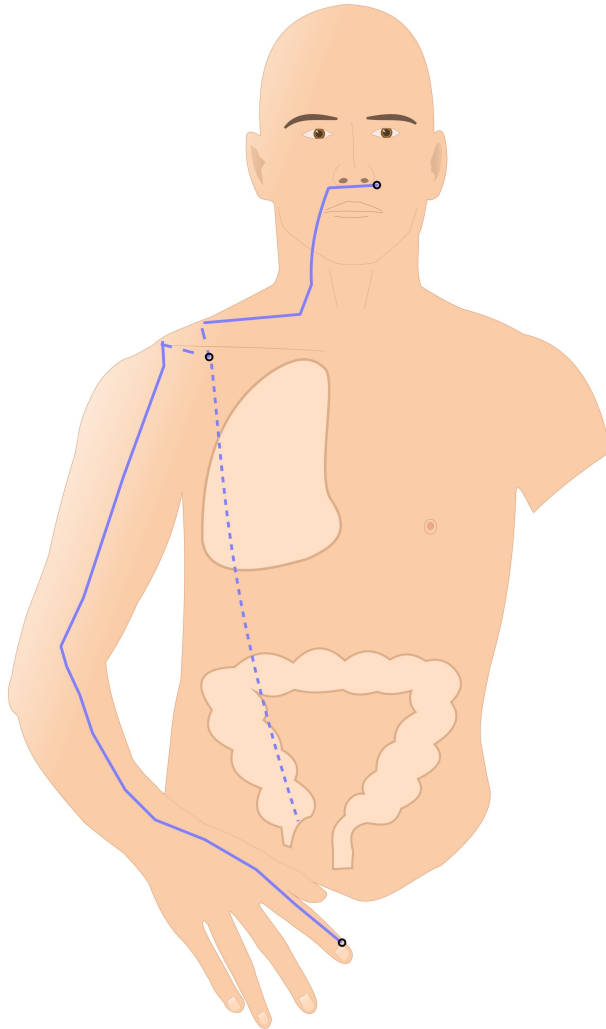
Lung Meridian (Yin)

Lung meridian and inner branch



Large Intestine Meridian (Yang)

Large intestine (Yang Ming) and its inner branches



Symptoms of Lung and Large Intestine imbalance:

Shortness of breath; coughing; excessive phlegm; easily catching colds; profuse sweating with little effort; loose stools / constipation; chronic sadness and melancholy.

Section 2: The Vital Substances

What Are the Vital Substances?

One of the very important concepts required to help you better understand the theory of Chinese Medicine is the theory around what the Chinese call "Vital Substances." These are the essential forms of Qi that manifest in the body.

Chinese Medicine sees the working of the body and mind as the result of the interaction of certain vital substances. These substances might be thought of as differentiated parts of a spectrum of energetic manifestation in the body. On one end of the spectrum you'll have energy that is very material, dense and distilled, and on the other end of the spectrum you'll have forms of energy that are immaterial and rarefied.

One of the reasons that's its important to have a good overview of these different "textures" of Qi is because these vital substances are the currency by which the health of the human system is evaluated and balanced. As I cover in the section on the Organs in Chinese Medicine, the primary functions of the Yin Organs – that is, the organs that are of central importance – is to produce, transform, store, and circulate these Vital Substances.

If we crudely borrow that metaphor of an orchestra, the Vital Substances would represent the various sounds, moods, and melodies generated and controlled by the musicians (or various orchestral instruments, *i.e.* the Organs of Chinese Medicine). So before diving in and looking more closely at the relationship that the Organs have with specific Vital Substances, it's a really good idea to have solid framework for the Substances themselves.

In Chinese Medicine, they are:

- Qi
- Blood
- Essence
- Fluids

The Sources and Functions of Qi

Sources of Qi:

1. **Pre-Natal, or Pre-Heaven Qi, or Original Qi (Yuan Qi):** This is the Qi of our inherited constitution from our parents. Main functions: a) motive force – arouses and moves the functional activity of all the organs; b) basis of Kidney Qi; c) facilitates the transformation of Qi and Blood.
2. **Food Qi, Grain Qi (Gu Qi):** This is one of the sources of post-natal or post-heaven Qi derived from food. Transformed and transported by the energy of the Spleen and Stomach.
3. **Air Qi (Lung Qi):** Qi we derive from the air we breath.

The primary source of Qi in the body is the process of digestion, governed by the Spleen and Stomach. Here, pure Qi is extracted from the dense bundles of Qi taken in through the digestion of food and fluids. The proper functioning of the Spleen and Stomach for digestion is, in turn, dependent on the Kidney Qi – which serves as a foundation for all metabolic transformation in the body. Finally, once the pure Qi is extracted from food and fluid by the Spleen, it is sent up to the Lungs, where this Food Qi combines with Qi coming in as Air. At this point the combined Food and Air Qi is transformed into True Qi which then circulates through the body, performing various functions.

The actual process of how all Vital Substances are produced is no simple act. Often one organ will play a principle roll, but many other organs play a strong supporting roll. For now, simply know that many organs are involved in the synthesis of Qi, but the primary player is the Spleen and Stomach, driven by their essential role in digesting food and fluids.

Functions of Qi:

As with everything in Chinese Medicine, all entities – whether they be a type of energy, an organ, or a meridian – tend to be defined by the functions they perform. And the concept of Qi is no different. Its classification as a type of energy is defined by what functions it performs, and for Qi there are Five Primary Functions, which I'll describe here:

1. **Transforming:** The function of "transforming" refers to the process whereby an adequate quantity of Qi makes it possible for *more* Qi to be produced. I know that can sound like some kind of circular tautology: "We need enough Qi to have enough Qi." But this is how the Chinese Medical system sees it. And in this function, the role of the Spleen's Qi to extract pure Qi from food and fluid is what is primarily being described. There are other examples of Organ Qi that "transform" forms of energy into other forms of energy, such as the Heart Qi transforming Food Qi into Blood which circulates through the vessels.
2. **Transporting:** The Transporting function of Qi refers to how Qi facilitates circulation of energy and Blood and Fluids in the body. If the True Qi of the Body is deficient or stagnant, this circulating function will be impaired, leading to a variety of internal imbalances. And as mentioned previously, ALL Organ Qi has a special roll in directing the circulation of Qi in a particular way, but the Liver Qi is the principal player in ensuring that the body's True Qi circulates in all directions, evenly and smoothly.
3. **Holding:** The Holding function of Qi refers to the role of holding things in their "proper places." Qi, in other words, keeps things in place. And this function applies primarily to the function the Spleen's Qi to keep the Blood and Organs in their proper places. With Blood, the Spleen's Qi is said to "wrap" the Blood in the Vessels, and if this function is impaired there may be bleeding disorders, such as external bleeding, nose bleeding, bleeding gums, rectal bleeding, excessive menstrual bleeding, or internal bleeding with bruising that doesn't properly heal, or hemorrhaging. With the function of holding the organs in their proper places, this refers to preventing organ prolapses.
4. **Raising:** This function is quite similar to the last, whereby Spleen Qi raises the organs, or supports them in remaining properly in place. But this function also includes certain organ Qi's, namely that of the Kidney's that assist in moving Qi and Fluids upward to other organs for circulation.
5. **Protecting:** The function of protection refers to Qi, specifically a kind of Qi known as Defensive

Qi's ability to fend off invasions from "evil" pathogenic factors. This role is primarily under the jurisdiction of the Lungs which spread Defensive Qi in the space between the skin and muscles, buttressing the body against invasive "evil ju-ju."

6. **Warming:** Lastly, Qi has a warming function. This is specifically the role of Spleen and Kidney Yang Qi. This keeps the body functioning at an appropriate temperature, but also plays an important role in regulating fluids and digestion, both of which require adequate heat, *i.e.* Yang Qi, for proper functioning.

The Four Ways to Influence Qi

There are four ways to *influence* your Qi:

1. Posture (how the body is positioned or held)
2. Breath (how you breathe)
3. Placement of Attention (where you place your mind's awareness)
4. Acupuncture / Acupressure

There are two approaches for *uniting* these four manners of influencing your Qi:

1. **Yang approach to influencing your Qi:** The Yang approach will emphasize directed attention and control. Within a Yin Yoga posture this would mean consciously directing your attention to a specific area of the body, and then breathing into that area with greater focus, and even force.
2. **Yin approach to influencing your Qi:** The Yin approach will emphasize receptivity, rather than control. Within a Yin Yoga posture you would let your mind receive sensations and the breath without managing or manipulating them.

What Is Blood?

In Chinese Medicine, on the spectrum of Qi manifestations in the body, Blood represents a denser, more material form of Qi. But it must be remembered that Blood is, nevertheless, a form of Qi. And, as we'll see, as two forms of Qi, Qi and Blood are in a reciprocal Yin and Yang relationship to each other, whereby they are intimately dependent on each other for production and circulation.

Blood Production

Before looking at the functional roles that Blood plays within the Chinese Theory of Medicine, it's important to consider how the Chinese saw Blood being produced, as this will contain important clues for things we will want to ensure an adequate that we have an adequate supply of Blood circulating in our system.

Similar to the production of Qi, the production of Blood is largely dependent on Qi that is extracted from Food and Fluids by the Spleen. The Qi that is transformed by the Spleen is turned into Food (Gu) Qi, that is sent to the Lungs, where the Lung Qi then pushes/pumps this Qi to the Heart where it is further transformed/refined into Blood.

Although the link between the Spleen producing Food Qi – which is ultimately sent to the Heart to be synthesized as Blood – is often described as the primary pathway of Blood formation, there is another

aspect of Blood production worth mentioning. And this parallel pathway relates to the Kidneys.

In Chinese Medicine, the Kidney Qi effects Blood production in two ways. As we'll see when I look more closely at the Kidneys, the Kidneys store what, in Chinese Medicine, is called Essence (deep distilled form of Qi). The Essence produces Original (Yuan) which combines with Food Qi in the Heart in the final stage of Blood formation. So this is one way that the energy of the Kidneys is related to production of Blood. But the second role relates to Essence. The Essence within the Kidneys is said to produce the Marrow, which not only produces Bones in TCM theory, but supports making Blood.

And this is fascinating in that Chinese Medical Theory describes a Kidney-Blood production connection that precedes the Western understanding of this connection by at least 300 years. I am not a scholar of Chinese Medicine, I'm a practitioner. But one of the main texts on Chinese Medical Theory, written by the author Giovanni Macciocia, a text that is still widely used even today, cites references from the Qing dynasty (late 17th Century) describing this connection. And in all likelihood, their theory on this relationship goes back several hundreds of years prior to this citation.

But it wasn't until the early 20th Century that Western scientists discovered the intimate relationship that the kidneys and bone marrow have with blood production. From a Western perspective, the kidneys monitor blood volume and oxygen levels of the blood. If these drop, the kidneys produce a hormone, erythropoietin, which is transported to bone marrow, via the blood, to activate the bone marrow to produce more red blood cells.

Daniel Keown, in *The Spark in the Machine*, explains:

"Potent and precise, erythropoietin is released when the kidneys sense low oxygen in the blood flowing through it. The kidney interprets low oxygen as meaning there aren't enough red cells, and releases erythropoietin which travels in the blood to the bone marrow. Here it causes the production of red cells. Without this hormone you would get very anaemic, very quickly."

And of course, the production of hormones is dependent on adequate nutrients, etc... so from a Chinese Medical perspective, this dovetails back to the importance of Food Qi in the cycle of Blood production.

To strengthen, tonify, and produce Blood, you'd want to look after your Spleen and Kidneys: Diet and lifestyle factors go along way towards looking after these organs.

Functions of Blood

As always, it bears repeating that the Chinese Medical Theory pivots on the functionality of the elements involved. Entities and substances are defined primarily by what they do and secondarily by what they are.

So in looking at Blood, it is important to consider the three main functions of Blood within the Chinese Medical model.

1. **Nourishing.** First and foremost, Blood is a **nourishing** energy. Blood nourishes and replenishes organs so that they may function properly, especially the Qi producing organs (Spleen, Lungs, and Kidneys). But Blood also nourishes all the tissues of the body ensuring they have the

nutriments required to maintain health and functionality. And this function of the Blood is intimately connected with the second main function of Blood.

2. **Moistening.** The second big function of the Blood in Chinese Medicine is that Blood is said to have the function of "**moistening**" tissues. Strong Blood prevents things from drying out. Healthy Blood keeps the tissues moist, keeps the eyes from feeling dry, keeps the sinews (or tendons) lubricated, and moistens the skin, nails and hair, preventing all from becoming dry, cracked, and brittle. I link this lubricating 'energetic' function of the Chinese concept of Blood to the lubricating function of Ground Substance in the Connective Tissue. It's when our Ground Substance or gel-component of our connective tissue is hydrated that the joints and sinews feel lubricated and permit an easy glide of movement. In my mind, there's a very similar functional overlap.
3. **Mind.** But the third function of Blood in Chinese Medicine is quite interesting. For the Chinese, Blood functions as the material substratum of the Mind, itself. In other words, adequate Blood anchors and supports the Mind, it roots the more ethereal energetic quality of the Mind. And here we see yet another Yin/Yang relationship between Blood and Mind, where Blood is a denser, more Yin energetic, that balances and controls the subtler, more rarefied, and Yang energetic of the Mind. Without adequate Blood, the Mind may not be grounded, leading to mental/emotional disturbances and/or odd/unusual behavior. And this will likely make a bit more sense when I look at the symptoms that commonly come up when there is a disharmony of the Blood.

Blood Disharmonies

1. **Blood Deficiency.** When the Blood of the body is deficient, any or many of the following symptoms may appear: paleness (either of the face, lips or skin), blurred vision (Blood not nourishing the eyes), depression (Bloods affect on the Mind), fatigue and/or numbness (Blood not nourishing the muscles), insomnia (a case where the Mind is restless from not being anchored by Blood), scanty or no menstrual periods. Blood Deficiency is frequently the result of a weakness in the Spleen, whereby the Spleen isn't able to create enough Food Qi to produce Blood. The remedy is often found in one's diet, eating a diet that is rich in greens, and notably the inclusion of animal proteins. As politically incorrect as this may sound in Yogic cultures, from a Chinese Medical perspective there is no better way to build blood than to include modest amounts (which will vary from person to person) of animal proteins, especially red meat. I may have just stepped on the third rail for some of you, but please remember not everyone's needs are the same. However, clinically, from what I've seen in 12 years of practice and from the consensus of many of my esteemed acupuncture colleagues, there is no better way to build/tonify one's blood. So if you think you may be Blood deficient based on the symptoms I just listed, perhaps a consultation with your acupuncturist is in order.
2. **Heat Toxicity.** Another Blood disharmony is when there is **Heat Toxicity in the Blood**. This simply means that some pernicious agent is causing the Blood to be "hotter" than it likes, usually leading to symptoms like red rashes on the skin (*i.e.* not nourishing the skin properly), bloodshot eyes (again the connection between Blood and the eyes), or mental disturbances, whereby the Heat in the Blood causes the Mind to be disturbed and displaced. Common causes of Heat Toxicity in the Blood are excessively spicy foods, over-consumption of alcohol, the build up of internal Heat from chronic Qi stagnation (such as from stress) or just an exceedingly hot day might agitate the Blood.
3. **Blood Stagnation.** And finally the third major disharmony of **Blood is stagnation**. This is a

deeper kind of energetic stagnation from Qi stagnation. For example, Qi stagnation can cause dull aches and pains. But Blood stagnation leads to sharp, stabbing, ice-picky kinds of pains. Blood stagnation often shows up with a purplish tinge in the complexion or skin. Blood Stagnation is often implicated in patterns involving strong abdominal pains, or painful menstrual cramps and endometriosis-type patterns.

But please remember, in Chinese Medicine, one sign or symptom on its own signifies absolutely NOTHING. It's only a constellation of signs and symptoms that together point to a particular pattern of disharmony from which you can start to address an imbalance.

So you could only make the case for having Blood deficiency or stagnation, or Qi deficiency or Qi stagnation, if there were multiple signs or symptoms pointing in that direction. (A sign is something that is externally observable, whereas a symptom is something that one experiences internally).

Lastly, I will mention the relationship between Qi and Blood, where, again, both are just particular manifestations of the more universal Qi in the body. And where Qi is Yang (quick, activating) to Blood which is more Yin (slow and nourishing).

The Relationship between Qi and Blood

1. Qi is sometimes described as the "commander" of Blood: In this sense, Blood is produced by the Qi which enables the organs to digest food properly and generate Blood. Additionally, Qi moves the Blood. Specifically, Liver Qi stores and regulates movement of Blood, Heart Qi transforms and transports Blood. And Spleen Qi produces Food Qi that becomes Blood as well as holding Blood in the vessels. So Qi helps produce, move, and contain the blood, hence Qi is said to "command" the Blood.
2. Blood nourishes the Qi, or Blood is said to be the "mother" of Qi. In this sense, Qi depends upon the nourishing function of Blood. If the organs aren't nourished by Blood, they won't be able to function properly and produce Qi to support the healthy physiological functions of the body and mind.

What Is Essence?

Sources of Essence

The concept of Essence (Jing) can be a little tricky for Westerners. The term conjures a sense of something pure and unchanging, something essential and permanent. But this is not really the way the term is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Within this medical theory, Essence refers to a very dense, pure, refined, and distilled manifestation of Qi. Essence is a very pure substance that is extracted from less refined, or coarser, substances (*i.e.* food and liquids). And as Macciocia puts it:

"This process of extraction of a refined essence from a larger, coarser substance, implies that Essence is a rather precious substance to be cherished and guarded."

Now, I don't want to confuse people too much, or go too deep into the weeds on this, but generally

speaking there are **three manifestations of Essence**. There's the "inherited" Essence or what the Chinese call pre-Heaven Essence that we inherit from our parents, and which determines our constitutional strength and unique character. There's the "acquired" Essence or what the Chinese call post-Heaven Essence which is generated by the refinement of Food and Fluid by the Spleen and Stomach.

And then there is the Kidney Essence, which is a co-mingling between the inherited Essence from the parents and the acquired Essence produced after birth, and it's this Kidney Essence that is really a foundational energy for the entire health of the body and mind.

Functions of Essence

1. Growth, reproduction, maturation and development: The Kidney Essence rules over growth, such as the development of bones, development of the mental faculties, and sexual maturation. It is also the energy that is necessary for successful sexual reproduction. But as we age, our supply of Essence is gradually consumed. In fact, that's what aging is: A gradual – well hopefully – gradual loss of Essence. And as we age, reproduction becomes more challenging precisely because of a depletion of Essence. In fact, all classical aging symptoms fall into the category of loss of Essence or Essence deficiency: Weakened bones, painful joints, lowered sexual functioning, hair loss, and loss of mental faculty.
2. The Kidney Essence is also the basis for the transformation of Kidney Qi. This is a little challenging to understand, but Kidney Essence, that deep, distilled and refined energy, is fluid in nature and very closely linked with Kidney Yin energy. But it's the Kidney Yang, or fire energy that also resides in the Kidneys, that is able to warm the Kidney Yin Essence and transform it to become Kidney Qi that circulates and supports not just the proper functioning of the Kidneys but all the internal organs. To some degree all the organs rely upon this foundational Qi for their own proper functioning. So if this function is impaired there may be: Frequent urination, accumulation of fluids (edema), sore or weak knees and lower back, low sex drive and/or impotence, and poor hearing (as the Kidney energy supports proper functioning of the ears).
3. The Essence is the basis for our constitutional strength refers to our bodies ability to fight off or resist disease. To help explain the basis for this function, it's important to understand that although Essence is stored in the Kidneys, it does circulate through the body in the Channels that are known as the Extraordinary Vessels. These Extraordinary Vessels (there are 8) are deeper reservoirs of Qi, Blood, and Essence in the body, and they serve to replenish the 12 main meridians if they become deficient. But one of the functions associated with these Extraordinary Vessels is that they circulate some of the Defensive Qi of the body. This is the Qi that wards off external invasions from external pathogens, and since these Vessels rely on Kidney Essence to function properly, Kidney Essence is intimately connected to our constitutional strength. Therefore, if someone has weakened Essence, this weakness can often manifest with patterns of frequently falling ill, catching colds easily, or chronic allergies. If someone's Essence is strong, they might be exposed to similar pathogens, but not come down with illness.
4. Finally, as you might remember from the discussion on Blood, the Kidney Essence nourishes the Marrow. This Marrow forms the complex of bone, and is said to also fill the spinal cord and thereby nourish the Brain. In fact, the brain and spinal cord are referred to as "The Sea of Marrow." So the Essence of the Kidneys not only maintains healthy bones, but it supports and nourishes proper brain function, such as the ability to concentrate and to possess a functioning

memory. Think, for a moment, what happens as people age. The faculty of memory begins to fade, diminish, if not vanish. The Chinese Medical Theory sees this impairment as linked to a decrease in Essence over one's life.

Now, as I mentioned, Essence is a refined substance that is hopefully gradually consumed and well-managed over the course of an individual's life. In my Yin trainings, I often will joke that the "rock and roll" lifestyle literally beats the hell out of one's Essence. Bad diet. Inadequate rest (*i.e.* not enough sleep). Add in the organ-damaging influences of drugs and alcohol. Not to mention loud music damaging the ears which would have a reciprocal affect on the Kidneys. And then, if you're male, throw in late-night dalliances with groupies (*i.e.* fornication – loss of semen is a direct loss of Essence), and you have a perfect "lifestyle cocktail" of Essence-destroying behavior. For women, child rearing and delivery is quite depleting on both Blood and Essence, whether its done in a "rock and roll" context or not.

But this is where the great doctors of Chinese Medicine put great emphasis on lifestyle practices as a means of conserving and preserving one's Essence. And the point I want to drive home here is that even though we may have been dealt a suboptimal supply of Essence from our parents, we can take measures through lifestyle decisions to supplement and better conserve our Essence. The theory is that if the Spleen is able to produce a surplus of Qi and Blood, or, in other words, if we have more Qi and Blood than we need for our daily activities, then when we get adequate rest at night to sleep, that surplus Qi and Blood is transformed into Essence which replenishes the Kidney Essence. So, proper diet for the individual is quite important. Proper sleep hygiene is really important. And in addition to that, our yoga practice, coupled with pranayama practice is a wonderful way to preserve Essence.

To summarize: "The best way to affect positively one's Essence is by striving for balance in one's life activities: balance between work and rest, restraint in sexual activity and balanced diet. Any irregularity or excess in these spheres is bound to diminish the Essence. A direct way to positively influence one's Essence is through breathing exercises and such exercises as Tai Ji Quan and Qi Gong." —Maciocia (*Foundations of Chinese Medicine*)

You might be wondering about Yin Yoga's relationship here. And I'd like to quote my acupuncture and meditation colleague, Linda Modaro, who described Yin Yoga as a "Qi Gong on the floor." That's more or less how I see Yin Yoga. To borrow the phrase from Sarah Powers, Yin Yoga, and really all yogas, are forms of "Qi-enhancing" disciplines. And particularly if you add in an element of deep diaphragmatic, belly breathing to benefit the Kidneys, Yin Yoga is a wonderful discipline for Essence preservation.

What Are Fluids?

In Chinese Medicine, the term "fluids" refers to the fluid substances of the human body. Fluids refer to anything in the body that flows; and this includes: Sweat, saliva, urine, stomach fluids, and likely interstitial fluid. As Wiseman and Ellis note in *Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine*: "The main functions of fluids are to keep the organs, muscles, skin, mucous membranes, and orifices adequately moistened, to lubricate the joints, and to nourish the brain, marrow, and bones."

All the major organs play an important role in fluid metabolism, but the Kidneys, Spleen, and Lungs are instrumental in fluid synthesis and circulation. Essentially, Fluids are derived from food and fluid that is

ingested. The Stomach and Spleen separate pure fluids from impure fluids, sending a portion of the pure fluids to the Lungs. The Lungs then disseminate some of those fluids throughout the body, especially under the skin, moistening the skin and body hair. The Lungs also descend some of the Fluids to the Kidneys, which then vaporize some of those Fluids, sending them back to the Lungs to moisten the Lungs, preventing the Lungs from drying out. All of these organ processes are dependent on the Kidney's Yang Qi to activate these metabolic processes. The Kidney Qi also assists the Bladder to manage Fluids in the Lower Burner.

Fluid Disharmonies

1. **Deficient and Damaged Fluids.** Often, the Fluids can be damaged by fevers, great sweating, profuse urination, vomiting, and diarrhea. External or Internal Heat will damage the Fluids, causing: Thirst, dry throat, lips, tongue, nose, and skin; constipation; scant urine.
2. **Excess Fluids / Water Swelling.** This pattern refers to excessive accumulation of Fluids, primarily caused by impairment of the Spleen, Lungs, and Kidneys. Symptoms of this kind of disharmony include: Swelling, edema (especially in the lower body), phlegm, cough with mucous, accumulation of Dampness.

What Is Spirit?

Spirit is what, in Chinese Medicine, distinguishes human life from animal life. Spirit is the most subtle and rarefied aspect of a person. Spirit allows for self-reflection, volitional intentions, meaning, and moral cultivation. In Chinese Medicine, there are **five spirits (psychological dimensions)**, each related to a specific Yin organ.

But the big Spirit, or "Shen," is located in the Heart, and is intimately connected with how we, as individuals, interact with the context that we find ourselves in. Disturbances to the Heart can lead to "Shen disturbances," which manifest as psychological or psychiatric symptoms. Additionally, the Spirit tends to be "anchored" to the body by the Yin aspect of Blood. Deficient Blood or agitated Blood can also lead to Spirit disturbances.

Common Patterns in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Deficiency Patterns	Excess Patterns	Mixed Patterns
<u>Qi Deficiency</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fatigue • loose stools • poor appetite • dizziness • pale face • weak voice/reluctance to speak • sweating with little/no exertion 	<u>Cold (Excess Yin)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chills w/no sweating • lack of thirst • clear urine • aversion to cold • loose stools • fatigue 	<u>Qi Stagnation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distention • pains that move around • depression • irritability
<u>Yang Deficiency</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chills • cold limbs • inability to get warm • loose stools • profuse clear urine • spontaneous sweating • lassitude 	<u>Heat (Excess Yang)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agitation • anger • insomnia w/nightmares • fever • red face/head • constipation • desire for cold drinks 	<u>Blood Stagnation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pain that is fixed, stabbing and/or severe • dark complexion • fixed masses • bleeding w/clots • purple lips/nails
<u>Yin Deficiency</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heat in the hands, feet and/or chest • malar flush • night sweats • anxiety • hot flashes 		<u>Dampness</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heaviness of the head/body • dizziness • poor appetite • stuffy chest • excessive mucus
<u>Blood Deficiency</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dizziness • palpitations • insomnia • dry skin and/or hair • poor memory • paleness • fatigue • scanty periods 		

Section 3: The Chinese Organs

What Are the Organs of Chinese Medicine?

In discussing the Chinese Organ systems, it is often suggested to think of the Chinese Organs in an entirely different manner from their Western counterparts. In other words, a Chinese Kidney is not a Western kidney, and never the twain shall meet. Notice I capitalized the Chinese "Kidney" and left the Western "kidney" uncapitalized. That difference is intentional. When you see a capitalized organ name, you know we're talking about the Chinese conception of that organ.

In his influential, early book, attempting to explain Chinese Medicine to a Western audience, Ted Kaptchuk in *The Web That Has No Weaver*, writes: *"The tendency of Chinese thought is to seek out dynamic functional activity rather than to look for the fixed somatic structures that perform the activities."*

Said slightly differently, in developing their understanding of internal medicine, the Chinese focused more on understanding the activity or functions associated with a particular organ system, rather than studying and observing the activity of an organ as being somewhat limited to its discrete location and physical structure.

For example, in Western Medicine, the kidneys are primarily involved with the functions filtering blood and forming urine, thereby contributing to the homeostasis of body fluids. And, in some sense, these "functions" are directly related to the physicality of the organ itself. The kidneys look and function like a filtration system.

But in Chinese Medicine, the term "Kidney" is really more of an umbrella term for a variety of functional relationships and holistic connections associated with the activity of Kidney energy. In Chinese Medicine, the Kidney energy regulates or "governs" Water, similar to the Western description, but there are a whole host of other functions not normally attributed to the Western organs function. For Chinese Medicine, the Kidneys are holistically involved with 1) storing our Essence or Jing, which is responsible for our birth, growth and development; 2) producing Marrow, controlling our Bones and nourishing our Brain; 3) controlling our ability to receive Qi and draw it into the body, retaining the Qi drawn in from the Lungs; 4) the Chinese Kidneys open to our Ears and support our ability to hear things clearly; 5) their energy manifests in our hair; 6) they house our Will Power and lastly; 7) they store the Gate of Vitality (Ming Men) the seat of our vitality, sexual potency, and Fire.

Western Medicine has a tendency towards reductionism, identifying functions related to the physical organ, exclusively. Whereas Chinese Medicine has a tendency towards holism, identifying functions related to the organism as a whole. With Chinese Medicine, the theory represents a landscape of functional relationships which provide total integration of bodily functions, emotions, mental activities, tissues, sense organs, and environmental influences.

Because of this, there's been a longstanding mutual agreement of "non-overlapping magisteria," to borrow a phrase from the late paleontologist, Stephen Jay Gould. Western Medicine is talking about one thing. And Chinese Medicine, when speaking about the organ systems, is talking about something

entirely different.

Giovanni Maciocia, in his classic textbook on Chinese Medical Theory, *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, summarizes this position of mutual exclusivity like this:

"When studying the Chinese theory of the Internal Organs, it is best to rid oneself of the Western concept of internal organs entirely. Western Medicine sees each organ only in its material-anatomical aspect, whereas Chinese Medicine sees each organ as a complex system encompassing its anatomical entity and its corresponding emotion, tissue, sense organ, mental faculty, color, climate and more."

But perhaps this doctrinaire view of non-overlapping paradigms is, itself, a bit too rigid. This view of non-overlapping magisteria was certainly what we I was taught in acupuncture school: To think of these two models of understanding the organs as two very different models.

But research over the last few decades has started to paint a different picture. As Western science literally begins to peel back a new understanding of the function and integration of its "Cinderella tissue" – Connective Tissue – a different picture may be coming into focus. With a potential biological substratum for the long-viewed mysterious meridians of Chinese Medicine, a new model of understanding of holistic connectivity is starting to emerge which speaks more directly to the functional connectivity of the body as a whole.

An emergent field in Western Medicine, called Functional Medicine, is now looking at human health as a functional whole, broadly observing how all the internal systems – including the organs – interact and support one another (leading towards health), or how they become imbalanced (leading to disease).

My own understanding of this similarity was awakened by Daniel Keown's book, *The Spark in the Machine*. Keown is a Western doctor who also trained, and now practices, Chinese Medicine. In any event, through his writing alone, Keown conveys both a voluminous knowledge of both systems which put him in a uniquely qualified position to better see and explain their convergences.

For me, at least, a different model of understanding is starting to emerge around these two ways of understanding of human internal medicine. Rather than seeing these systems as separate, non-overlapping fields of medicine, it might be better to think of these systems as just different lenses of perception and ways of understanding the same experience. In other words, **one experience** with different paradigms and different kinds of conceptual language for describing the same process.

Chinese language, at least to my ears, tends to describe these processes and dynamics more poetically. Their language is metaphorical, often drawing on images from nature and human governance to describe the various processes of human health. And within these poetics, a Western tendency for reductive specificity is lost, which has caused the Western model to be rather dismissive of other systems, "We can't see it! Where's this mysterious life force you call Qi? Must be superstitious voodoo!"

Yin vs. Yang Organs

In Chinese Medicine, the organs are classified into two categories, Yin (or Zang) and Yang (or Fu). Therefore the Chinese name for all Internal Organs is simply "Zangfu."

The terms "zang" and "fu" both mean "organ," and it is through an analysis of the Chinese characters for each that we might get a better understanding about what these two types of organs do.

The character for "zang" has one part that indicates "flesh" and another part that indicates "to store." This suggests that the "Zang" or Yin organs are involved with producing and storing the vital substances. Here, vital substances refers to the various textures of energy, or Qi, that are vital for the maintenance of health and life. These vital substances include:

- Our Essence (our deepest, most distilled energy obtained, primarily, from our parents);
- Our Blood (a denser manifestation of Qi that nourishes the body and moistens our tissues);
- Our Qi (an immaterial energetic intelligence that promotes transformation, circulation of other substances, as well as providing a mechanism of warming and protecting the body); and
- Our Fluids (whose function is to moisten and nourish skin and muscles, as well as moistening or "thinning out" the Blood).

From a Chinese analysis, the Zang or Yin Organs are of vital importance towards maintaining and balancing our health. In addition to producing and storing these vital substances, the various Yin Organs are also functionally connected to a particular tissue in the body, to a particular sense organ, and also to a particular aspect of our psyche or Spirit. Here we see the holistic view in practice.

But, and this needs repeated emphasis, the Yin Organs of Chinese Medicine are also bound to each other in holistic dynamics of support, control, and balance. As we'll see, understanding what each Yin Organ is responsible for on its own is really a fragmentary picture of the larger network of interacting influence that they all play together in the promotion of health and vitality.

Nevertheless, the Yin Organs are the main primary players of Chinese Medicine. Some systems list five Yin Organs. Some systems list six. This can be confusing. The list of Five includes: The **Kidneys**, the **Liver**, the **Spleen**, the **Lungs**, and the **Heart**. In the list of Six, the Pericardium is listed as the sixth Yin Organ. But in many systems, because the Pericardium is the protective sheath around the Heart, its functions are subsumed under the domain of the Heart's functions. And this view is the predominant one in TCM practice, so going forward, I'll simply refer to the 5 "Zang" or 5 Yin Organs: Kidneys, Liver, Spleen, Lungs, and Heart (including the Pericardium).

Structurally, the Yin Organs tend to be deeper in the body, and they tend to be solid in nature, and this is related to their storing capacity. The one exception being the Lungs, which are the "hollow" Yin Organ.

In contrast, the "Fu" Organs, or Yang Organs, are more hollow, or empty in structure. The Chinese character for "Fu" indicates a "seat of government," and as Maciocia states: "This indicates that the Yang organs are in charge of transforming food and drink to produce Qi and Blood, just as the government in ancient China was considered to be in charge of food distribution."

The Yang Organs tend to be hollow, allowing them to be filled and emptied. Filled with and emptied of what? Filled and emptied with the raw materials of Qi and Blood. The Yang Organs receive food and fluids that we take in and begin to separate the pure Qi from the impure. The Yang Organs pass on the pure Qi to the Yin Organs where they are further refined and stored, and the Yang Organs pass along the unused "impure" waste products. Most of our Western alimentary canal is categorized by the Six Yang

Organs of Chinese Medicine: The **Stomach**, the **Small Intestine**, the **Large Intestine**. Additionally, the Chinese include the **Bladder** and **Gall Bladder** as Yang organs, as well as a curious organ called the **Triple Burner**, or Triple Heater, which has no Western counterpart as an organ, as such, but more on that one later.

To put this together, we have a picture of 5 Zang or Yin organs and 6 Fu or Yang organs, all part of an interconnected network of physiological and mental dynamics to promote health and vitality, and to ward off disease.

Yin Organs: Kidneys

Element: Water

Season: Winter

Emotion: Fear

General syndromes: Disorders of growth and development, including problems with fertility, conception and pregnancy; disorders of the spinal column, bones, teeth; disorders of fluid metabolism.

General symptoms: Soreness and pain of the lumbo-sacral region; loose teeth; deafness/tinnitus; thinning or loss of head hair; weakness and pain in knees; impotence/infertility.

1. **The Kidneys Store Essence:** Essence is in charge of ruling over birth, development, and maturation. Essence is the basis for all of Life's processes. Essence is divided into yin and yang aspects. The Yin Aspect of the Kidneys is Water and the Yang aspect of the Kidneys is called Ming Men Hua, or Life Gate Fire. Fertility issues and developmental delays (physical and mental) are related to weakened Essence.
2. **The Kidneys Rule Water:** The Kidneys are the foundation upon which the entire process of water movement and transformation is built. Water here refers to all the moisture in the body. Water is also thought of as the opposing principle to Fire. In other words, Water is the Yin to Fire's Yang. Kidneys rule over water through their Yang aspect, through this Gate of Life Fire, which, some say, resides between the Kidneys (others say the Gate of Life Fire resides in the right Kidney) and transforms water into mist, a necessary first step before fluids can circulate. Problems with this function result in edema, frequent urination.
3. **The Kidneys Store the Will:** "The Kidneys are associated with both aspects of Will. The Yang Will, the forceful assertions that shape the course of decades, belongs here. The big shifts, decisive efforts, and fundamental commitments that allow a person to take responsibility for his or her life are the creation of Yang Will's volition. The Yang Will is the most dynamic assertive aspect of a person, the ultimate FIRE." "The Yin Will is the other side of Will. It is a deeper encounter with the inexorable and ultimate destiny that already exists hidden in the undifferentiated seed. It is the recognition that the deepest force requires no effort. The Yin Will is elusive, almost intangible. It is noticed in stillness. It has the quality of irreducible mystery. The Yin Will is about the inevitable, about a direction we each move toward that can be seen only when we turn around and look at how we have developed through time. It is about fate and destiny. It is about the unknown.... Recognition of the Yin Will allows for the creation of the virtue of Wisdom. This Wisdom is not about knowing things. In fact, it is more about being deeply connected to the

unknown. Wisdom is the recognition of that fact that life is an intertwining of known and unknown. We know that death is involved; but we also know that the unknown is involved. Wisdom is the recognition of a deep knowing that infuses life. The Yang Will ultimately must accept the Yin Will in order that the Essence bear the fruit of Wisdom. Resolution must acknowledge the inevitable; certitude must bow before the unknown. Age often weakens the physical aspect of Essence, but maturity is the necessary ingredient for the spiritual dimension of Essence to unfold. Essence reflects itself in Wisdom gained through a reflective life. When the Will is not intact, a person can have an uncontrollable fear or a dread of death, existential anxiety, or an inability to feel the gracefulness of becoming older. Fear and Wisdom share a similar energetic – both are an encounter with the Unknown. Fear, however, cannot embrace the unknown with trust; fear cannot recognize the inevitability of the unknown. Wisdom, on the other hand, acknowledges the profound truth and tranquility of the unknown." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)

4. **The Kidneys Rule the Bones and Produce the Marrow:** The Kidneys store the Essence, and it is said that the Essence produces marrow. The marrow, in turn, is responsible for creating and supporting bones. Therefore, the bones' development and repair depend on the nourishment of the Kidney Essence.
5. **The Kidneys Open to the Ears:** When Kidney Qi goes through the ear; if the Kidney is harmonized, the ear can hear the five tones. Many hearing problems are treated through the Kidneys.
6. **The Kidneys Grasp the Qi:** The Kidneys work with the Lungs in the process of taking in the Qi from air. The Lungs initiate the absorption of Qi from air, but the Kidneys are said to "hold the Qi down," so it can be assimilated. If this Kidney function is impaired, there may be breathlessness, or asthma. Full diaphragmatic breathing supports the Kidney's ability to "grasp" the Qi.
7. **The Gate of Life Vitality (Ming Men):** The Gate of Vitality can be considered as the root of Yang in the body. It is the root of Original Qi, because the Gate of Vitality "activates" Essence into Qi that circulates throughout the body. The Gate of Vitality is also the source of Fire for all the other organs. If this Fire "spark" is weak, there will be generalized cold and dysfunction in any of the organ systems affected by this lack of Fire (especially the Spleen's Yang that relies on the Gate of Vitality for warming the digestion process). The Gate of Vitality is also 'vital' for healthy sexual function, including fertility and performance.

Yin Organs: Liver

Element: Wood

Season: Spring

Emotion: Irritation/Anger

General Syndromes: Disturbances of peripheral nerves and circulation; disturbances of equilibrium, coordination, locomotion; migratory pain and swelling; tension, cramps, and spasms of muscles; disorders characterized by erratic and irregular function.

General Symptoms: Irritability; pain under the ribs; nausea; bitter taste in mouth; short temper; pain in lower abdomen or groin; irregular menses; abnormalities of the fingers and toenails; pain in the eyes.

The Liver is closely connected with Blood; the Liver also "softens," "spreads," or "sprinkles" the Qi throughout the body.

1. **The Liver Stores the Blood:** In storing the Blood, the Liver regulates the volume of Blood in the body. When inactive, or lying down (to sleep), the Blood returns to the Liver to be stored. When active, the Liver releases Blood so that the muscles are nourished to perform physical activity. Also the Liver's Blood is responsible for the repetitive cycle of a woman's menstrual cycle, and disharmonious of the Liver's Blood can cause irregular or painful menstruation.
2. **The Liver Ensures the Smooth Flow of Qi:** This is one of the most important functions of all the organs. The Liver controls the smooth, free-flow of Qi throughout the entire body, supporting all the organs to function properly. Disturbances to the Liver can impair this free-flow of Qi, leading to Liver-specific symptoms (pain, irritability) or it can cause disharmony with any other organ. "The Liver fosters a relaxed, easygoing internal environment – an even disposition. Creating this ambience can be thought of as the function of the Liver, as well as a basic need of the Liver itself. The Liver Qi often becomes stuck and blocked in its own pathways and will then manifest symptoms such as pain or distention in the flanks, swollen or painful breasts and genitals, gas distention, or lower abdominal pain. If the stagnation affects the psyche, there's a sense of frustration, being hampered, or edginess." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)
3. **The Liver Stores the Non-Corporeal Soul (Hun):** "The Hun is responsible for human kindness or benevolence, it is sensitive to the boundaries that make for the recognition of self and others. When the Hun takes too much ground a person can easily be angry, belligerent, or stubborn or fly off the handle. When the Hun is insufficient, there may be a lack of self-worth or self-esteem." "The Hun and Blood also are concerned with the capacity to be sensitive to pain. While stuck Qi often causes pain, Blood has more to do with how a person reacts to pain. The ability to stay "soft" while experiencing pain, to not tense up, to give pain "more room," depends on the Liver's Blood and Hun. Blood allows pain to be more bearable and less debilitating. Without this capacity, a person can be numb or insensitive to either his or her own physical or spiritual suffering or that of others." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)
4. **The Liver Rules the Tendons and Is Manifest in the Nails:** In Chinese medicine, "tendons" refers to a broad category of tissues that includes ligaments, tendons, joint capsular tissue and, to some extent, muscles. If the Liver's Blood is insufficient and incapable of nourishing the Tendons, symptoms such as spasms, tightness, numbness of limbs, and difficulty in bending or stretching may result. Liver disharmonies may also cause the nails to be thin, brittle and pale.
5. **The Liver Opens to the Eyes:** All Yin and Yang organs contribute their purest energy to the eyes. "When the Liver is harmonized, the eyes can distinguish the five colors." "When the Liver receives Blood, the eyes can see." Many disorders of the eyes and of vision are related to the Liver.

Yin Organs: Spleen

Element: Earth

Season: Late Summer

Emotion: Worry/Rumination

General Syndromes: Disturbances of digestion and absorption; disorders of lymphatic circulation; disorders of fluid distribution; diseases of the muscles; disorders of blood and veins.

General Symptoms: Indigestion, abdominal distention and flatulence, poor appetite, loose bowels, anemia, hemorrhoids, bruising.

1. **The Spleen Rules Transformation and Transportation, or Digestion:** The Spleen is the crucial link in the process by which food and fluids are transformed and refined into Qi and Blood. The Spleen is referred to as the foundation of postnatal existence (our existence after birth). If the Spleen is in disharmony, the whole body or some part of it may be deficient in Qi or Blood. If digestion is affected, such symptoms as abdominal distention, pain, diarrhea, or appetite disorders may appear (no appetite). The Spleen digests warm, cooked foods, and is "injured" by cold, dairy, sweet, and fried foods.
2. **The Spleen Rules the Blood:** The Spleen rules the Blood not just in terms of its production (extracting pure essences from foods and fluids) but also in terms of keeping the Blood in its proper place, or "wrapping the Blood in the vessels." Excessive bleeding anywhere in the body might be seen as a Spleen weakness. Also lack of Blood, as in amenorrhea (absence of period), is sometimes seen in terms of a Spleen deficiency.
3. **The Spleen Rules the Muscles and Flesh:** The Spleen transports Qi and Blood to the muscles and flesh, giving them strength and energy for activity. Muscle tone and appearance of the limbs indicate the relative strength or weakness of the Spleen. Specifically, fatigue and a "heaving" feeling in the limbs is associated with excessive Dampness and weakness of the Spleen.
4. **The Spleen Stores the Consciousness of Potentials (Thought):** There is a bi-directional relationship between the strength of the Spleen and our ability to think clearly. If the Spleen is damaged due to improper diet, this can cause excessive worry and rumination. Conversely, if someone is engaged in excessive cognitive work (completing a PhD, for example), this mental activity can weaken the Spleen leading to digestive problems and/or depression. "Through this activity, the Spleen has an additional link to Qi. It is its consciousness of potentials dimension where the Spleen is responsible for considerations of options, pondering possibilities, and making final decisions. It is the source of motivation and creativity. If the Spleen is healthy, a person has clear thoughts, and can make decisions. A harmonious Spleen enthusiastically engages the world. If the Spleen is unbalanced, a person can worry easily, have difficulty making decisions, be mentally unclear and confused, be excessively helpful, or just feel bored and uninterested." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)
5. **The Spleen Opens Into the Mouth, Manifested in the Lips:** The mouth and lips are closely related to the Spleen. The Spleen's Qi empowers the mouth to detect the five tastes, and brings Blood to the lips so they are red and moist. If Spleen is weak, the mouth will be insensitive to taste and the lips will be pale. One's sense of taste, and appreciation of food is dependent upon the Spleen's strength. Lack of appetite is a sign of a weakened Spleen, as well as a lack of zest for life, itself.

Yin Organs: Lungs

Element: Metal

Season: Fall

Emotion: Sadness

General Syndromes: Upper-respiratory disorders; disorders of the skin; airborne allergies; disorders of fluid circulation.

General Symptoms: Shortness of breath, coughing, excess Phlegm, vulnerability to colds and flu.

"The Lungs are concerned with the momentary and the ephemeral. Healthy Lungs allow for a single moment or any singular episode of time to become complete. The Lungs are called the "TENDER ORGAN" because they are easily affected by fleeting events, whether respiration, an acute cold or flu, or short-lived emotions, or acknowledging and accepting both the completeness and impermanence of a precious encounter or cherished life." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)

1. **The Lungs Govern Qi and Respiration:** The Lungs are the organ in which the Qi outside the body meets the Qi inside the body. The Lungs take in the Qi from the air and combine this Air Qi with the Food Qi that it receives from the Spleen. This combination of Food and Air Qi is called Gathering Qi, and it's this Qi that circulates all over the body to promote all the necessary physiological functions.
2. **The Lungs Regulate the Water Passages:** The Lungs receive pure fluids from the Spleen, which they then turn into a "fine mist." This mist is spread under the skin, thereby moistening the skin. The Lungs are also involved with the process of "descending and liquefying," whereby the Lungs move water to the Kidneys. The Kidneys vaporize these fluids which they then in turn send back to the Lungs to keep the Lungs moist.
3. **The Lungs Rule the Exterior of the Body:** Regulating the secretion of sweat and the moistening of the skin. The Lungs also spread Defensive Qi in the space between the skin and muscles. This Defensive Qi protects the body from EPI's (External Pathogenic Influences, or Evil Pernicious Invasions).
4. **The Lungs Open to the Nose:** Our sense of smell and ability to breath through the nose is dependent on the Lung Qi being strong. Additionally, the throat is said to be the "door" of the Lungs and the "home" of the vocal cords. Many common nose and throat disorders are therefore treated through the Lungs.
5. **The Lungs Store the Corporeal Soul (Po):** The Corporeal Soul relates to our management of transient life experiences. On one level, this refers to the transience of the respiratory process. On another level, the Corporeal Soul helps us receive and let go of a variety of life experiences. If this soul is healthy, we can navigate life's inevitable losses with courage. But if weakened, we can succumb to chronic grief or sadness, never "letting go" of the loss. "Of all the emotions, the Po is especially sensitive to mourning and grief and disturbances in gaining a sense of completion. The Lungs experience longing and loss easily. Disturbed Lungs can produce unresolved grief and a failure to see the delicate integrity of the temporal world. In another sense, when the Po is intact, it produces the virtue of impartial justice and the sense of perfect, non-replicable beauty." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)

Yin Organs: Heart

Element: Fire

Season: Summer

Emotion: Joy

General Syndromes: Cardiovascular diseases; disturbances of speech, thinking, emotional expression; sleep disturbances.

General Symptoms: Irregular rate of pulse; pain in the chest; sweating; restlessness.

1. The Heart Governs Blood:

- a. The transformation of Food-Qi into Blood takes place in the Heart.
- b. The Heart is responsible for the circulation of Blood in the vessels, just the same as in Western Medicine... although other Yin organs play a role. Although our constitution is primarily related to the Essence and the Kidney, it is also partly determined by the relative constitutional strength of the Heart and Blood. If the Heart is strong and Blood is in ample supply and circulation, a person will be full of vigor and have a good constitution. If the heart is constitutionally weak and blood deficient, a person will have a poor constitution and lack of strength.

2. The Heart Controls the Blood Vessels: Controls circulation of Blood through the vessels.

3. The Heart Manifests in the Complexion: If the Heart Blood is abundant and the Heart is strong, the complexion will be rosy and lustrous. If the Blood is deficient, the complexion will be pale or white. If the Blood is stagnant, the complexion will be bluish-purple.

4. The Heart Opens to the Tongue: The tongue is considered to be the offshoot of the Heart, and the condition of the Heart primarily affects speech. "Heart abnormalities may cause stuttering or aphasia. Apart from speech difficulties themselves, the Heart also influences talking and laughing. Often a disharmony of the Heart (whether excess or deficiency) can cause a person to talk incessantly or laugh inappropriately." (Maciocia, *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*)

5. The Heart Houses the Mind/Shen: "The Heart is the residence of the Shen. The Heart guarantees connection and stores the small Spirit component of the person's entire Spirit. The Heart Spirit ensures that whatever consciousness, intention, volition, thought, reflection, and self-awareness exist within the large composite Spirit intersects and 'clicks' with the world of time and space. The Heart is responsible for appropriate behavior, timely interactions, and being suitable in context. Being respectful, helpful, thoughtful or emotional is only virtuous when the Heart Spirit ensures the moment is right. The Heart Spirit guides the larger Spirit into the world of manifestation. Intending to take an elderly person shopping is helpful before going shopping, not afterward. The Shen ensures the timing. Wearing a bathing suit with a towel around one's neck at a poolside is fine, but not before a gathering of businesspeople with whom you are negotiating a financial transaction. The Heart Shen ensures picking suitable places for particular actions. When Shen is disturbed, one has symptoms such as insomnia, situational anxiety, and inappropriate or even bizarre behavior. Discomfort with certain situations and people often has to do with the Heart, as do the somatic correlates of anxiety, such as sweating, blushing, being flustered, and palpitations. When the Heart spirit is in tact, one connects with propriety and tact." (Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*)

Yang Organs

Stomach (Spleen)

Receives ingested food and fluids and is called the "sea of food and fluid." Stomach and Spleen are closely related in activity. The Spleen rules the ascending of digestive energy and the Stomach rules the descending of digestive energy. Disharmonies of the Stomach's Qi can be nausea, stomachache, distention, belching and vomiting.

Gall Bladder (Liver)

The Gall Bladder stores and secretes bile produced by the Liver. It sends bile downward and into the intestines and aids the digestive process. Any disruption of the Liver affects the Gall Bladder's secretion of bile. A disharmony of the Gall Bladder will affect the Liver (vomiting). The Gall Bladder rules courage and decisiveness. Anger and rash decisions are indicative of excess Gall Bladder Qi, whereas, timidity and fear of particular places and things is a sign of Gall Bladder deficiency.

Bladder (Kidneys)

The Bladder receives and excretes urine, which is produced in the Kidneys. Disharmonies lead to urinary problems: incontinence, burning urination, difficulty urinating. The Bladder and Kidney have a complementary function.

Small Intestine (Heart)

The Small Intestine receives what the Stomach has not completely decomposed and continues the process of separation and absorption. Disharmonies of the Small Intestine include: abdominal pain, intestinal rumblings, diarrhea or constipation.

Large Intestine (Lungs)

The Large Intestine moves parts of food and fluids down while absorbing water from the waste material. Disharmonies include: abdominal pain, intestinal rumblings, diarrhea or constipation.

Triple Burner (Pericardium)

The Triple Burner is a challenging organ to define. In Chinese Medicine, there has been an ongoing debate over the role and function of this organ. There are two common interpretations. The first is that the Triple Burner is an "avenue for Original Qi," meaning that the Original Qi from the Kidneys reaches all the other organs via the intermediary organ of the Triple Burner. Another interpretation/role of the Triple Burner is that it represents a "meta-organ" of the three divisions of the body with the Upper Burner composed of the Lungs and Heart, the Middle Burner composed of the Spleen and Stomach, and the Lower Burner composed of the Kidneys, Bladder and Intestines. Each Burner deals with Fluids in a particular way. The Upper spreads Fluids as a "mist." The Middle Burner dealing with digestion, and is compared to a "bubbling cauldron." And the Lower Burner deals with removal of impure Fluids, and is compared to a "ditch."

Section 4: The Power Points of Acupuncture

Acupuncture Points, Joints, and Yin Yoga

Acupuncture points are the specific points on the meridians that influence and regulate the flow of Qi and Blood that is circulating in the body. If we view Qi as "organizational intelligence" or as good "metabolism," and if we see the meridians existing as conduits of that intelligence, then the acupuncture points on the meridians could be viewed as the "control centers" for that intelligence.

As Daniel Keown describes it in *The Spark in the Machine*: "The intuitive truth regarding channels and points is that one cannot exist without the other. To have control you need a messaging system, and a messaging system needs a control center. The Acupuncture points are the control centers in this messaging system but they would be nothing without the channels of communication. Just like the chicken and the egg it is impossible to imagine one without the other."

The Transporting (Shu) Points

One of the earliest texts on acupuncture called the *Huang Di Nei Jing (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)* detailed a group of acupuncture points as being more powerful than others. These are called the "Transporting" or "Shu" points, and their names relate to the flow of water. Every meridian has a set of these five Transporting points located consistently as described below, where the Qi's strength is compared to the relative strength of water.

- *Well (Jing) points*: These begin at the corner of nails on the fingers and toes. These points are where the Qi of the meridian starts to "bubble."
- *Spring (Ying) points*: These occur at the webbing of fingers and toes. At these points, the Qi of the meridian starts to "gush."
- *Stream (Shu) points*: These are found on the wrists and ankles. Here, the Qi of the meridian is flourishing.
- *River (Jing) points*: These are found midway up the shins and forearms. At these points, the Qi of the meridian is "pouring abundantly."
- *Sea (He) points*: These are located at the creases of the knees and forearms. These points represent the confluence of River and Sea, where the Qi is most flourishing.

With the exception of the River points, all of these points are located at sites of great change in the body, and most of these are found at joint sites. Similarly, many other powerful acupuncture points are located at sites of great change, specifically along the spine. In other words, the Chinese identified a relationship between areas of transition in the body (joints) and the influence of Qi flow. This is clearly described in the passage below:

"Channel pathology is, in fact, closely related to joint pathology. Joints in Chinese Medicine are more than just anatomical entities: they have an important function with regard to the circulation of Qi and Blood, with several implications in pathology.

Joints are places where Qi and Blood concentrate or gather, and they are also the places where Qi goes from the Interior to the Exterior or vice versa. The joints are the places along the channels where Qi enters and exits. It is not by chance that many of the major Transporting points of the limbs below elbows and knees are situated on joints. As a consequence of this concentration of Qi, the joints are the places where a pathogenic factor easily settles.

When a pathogenic factor invades the joint, it alters the balance of Yin-Yang, it upsets the circulation of Qi in the channel and it causes Qi and Blood to stagnate: This causes pain and in the long run it gives rise to Painful Obstruction Syndrome. If the pathogenic factor is associated with Heat, the joint will feel hot; if it is associated with Cold, it will feel cold.

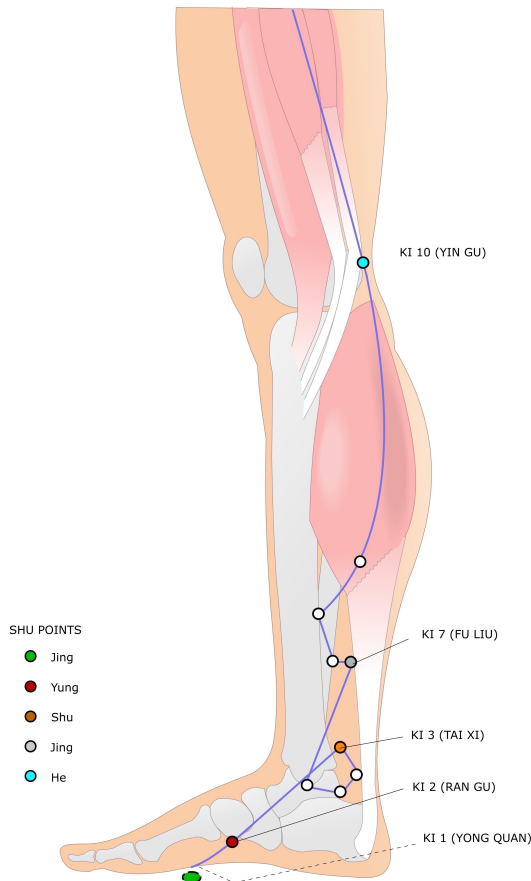
Besides being affected by exterior pathogenic factors, joints are affected by general deficiency of Qi and Blood which may cause their lack of nourishment and hence weakness."

—Maciocia, *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*

The passage above presents one of the primary rationales for why we want to specifically target our joints in Yin Yoga. By gently stressing the joints, we cause a temporary build up, "damming up," or stagnation of Qi and Blood, only to yield greater flow and circulation once the posture is released.

Kidney Points

KIDNEY MERIDIAN: LEG POINTS



Kidney 1 "Bubbling Spring" Yongquan

Location: Found on the sole of the foot, between the 2nd and 3rd metatarsal, at the junction of the anterior third and posterior two-thirds of the sole.

Actions: Strongly brings the Qi down; used for excess above (in head); strong grounding function. Nourishes Kidney yin; brings down Liver yang or Liver fire rising (vertex or temporal headaches); used for hypertension. KD 1 is good for cramping anywhere in body. "Important point in Tai Chi and Qi Gong theory and practice, as it is through this point that one grounds to the earth and through which earth energy is inhaled and exhaled." (Patrick Cunningham, *Acupuncture Points*)

Kidney 3 "Great Valley" Taixi

Location: In the depression between the medial malleolus and the calcaneal tendon, level with the tip of the medial malleolus.

Actions: Main point for nourishing Kidneys Qi, yin and yang. Strengthens the Kidneys in grasping the

Qi. Nourishes the reproductive system. Good point for low back pain and knee pain; strengthens the bone marrow.

Kidney 6 "Shining Sea" Zhaohai

Location: 1 cun below the medial malleolus.

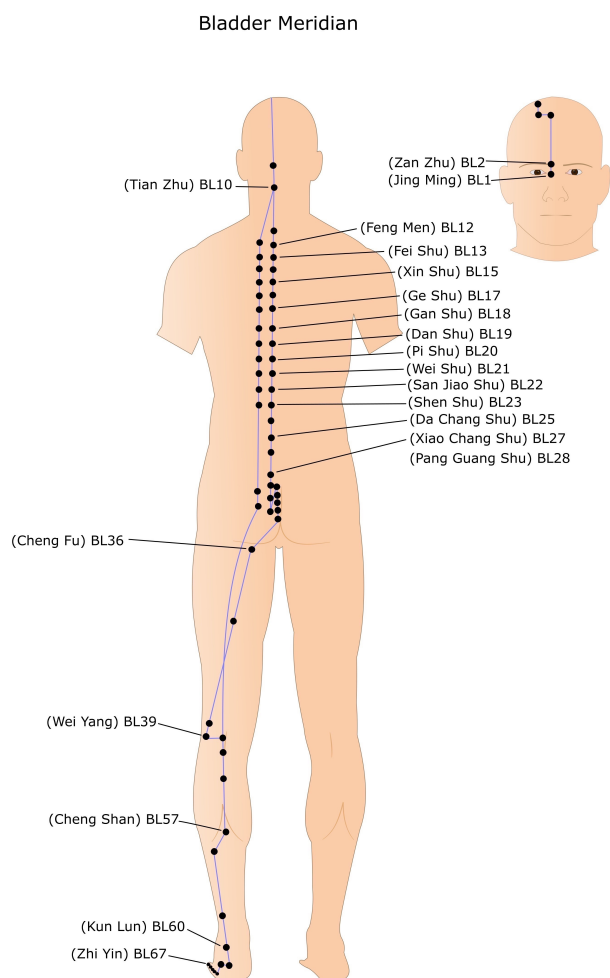
Actions: Main point for nourishing Kidney Yin, especially any pattern with empty Heat symptoms.

Kidney 10 "Yin Valley" Yingu

Location: At knee crease, with knee flexed, in the space between the tendons of semimembranosus and semitendinosus muscles (inner hamstrings).

Actions: Water point on the Water meridian; used for problems with urogenital system. Used as a water point to calm Liver Yang or Liver Fire; benefits the knees.

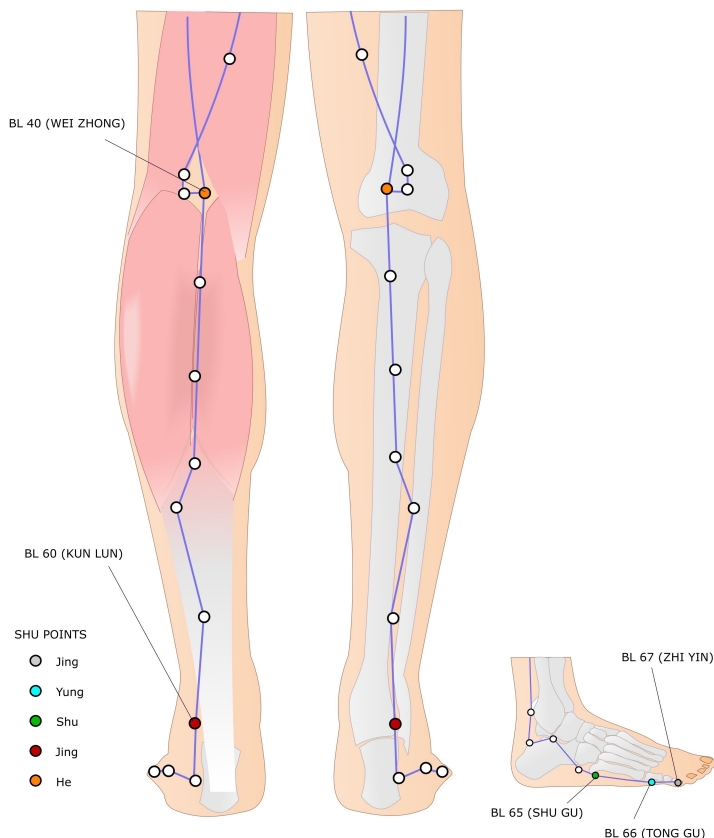
Bladder Points



Bladder 13-28

Coming down the "inner" Bladder Channel along the spine, the Back Transporting (Shu) points are found. This important group of points transport Qi to all the major organs, and each point has a special organ that it is connected to. For example, Bladder 13 is the Shu point for the Lungs, Bladder 15 is the Shu point for the Heart, etc. The full list is: BL 13 (Lungs), BL14 (Pericardium), BL15 (Heart), BL16 (Governing Vessel Shu), BL17 (Diaphragm Shu), BL 18 (Liver), BL 19 (Gall Bladder), BL 20 (Spleen), BL 21 (Stomach), BL 22 (Triple Burner), BL 23 (Kidney), BL 24 (Sea of Qi Shu), BL 25 (Large Intestine), BL 26 (Storage of Original Qi Shu), BL 27 (Small Intestine), and BL 28 (Bladder).

BLADDER MERIDIAN: LEG POINTS



Bladder 40 "Bending Center" Weizhong

Location: In the middle of the horizontal crease at the back of the knee between the tendons of biceps femoris and semitendinosus.

Actions: Main point for acute lower back problems; strengthens the back and knees. Used for many conditions involving Damp-Heat (*i.e.* skin problems that are itching, inflamed, oozing).

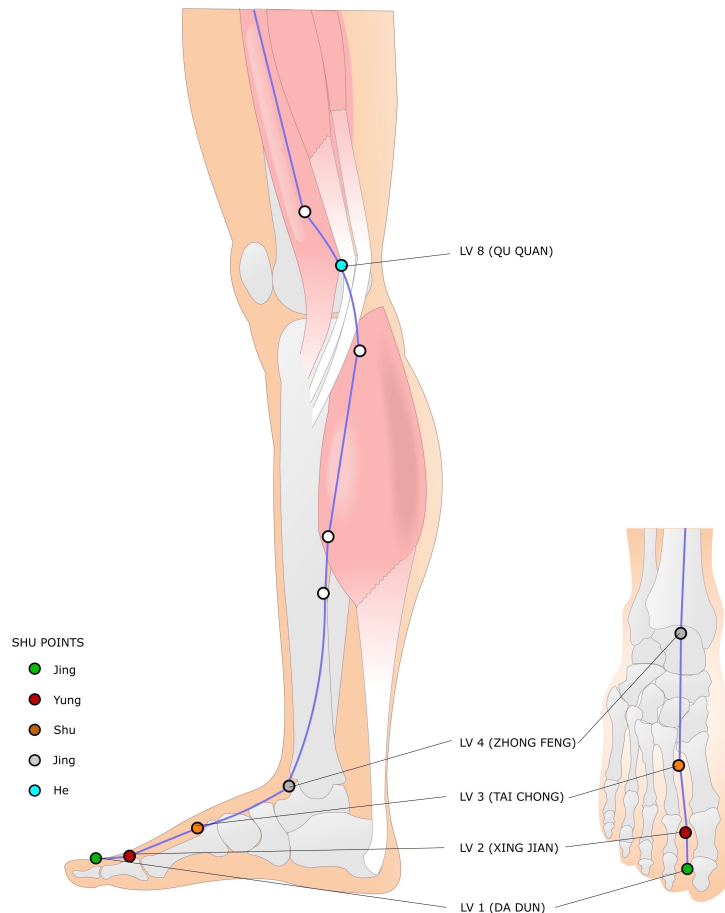
Bladder 60 "Kunlun Mountains" Kunlun

Location: In the depression between the lateral malleolus and the calcaneal tendon.

Actions: Used for headaches (occipital), stiff neck, chronic low back pain, calcaneal tendonitis, labor induction (some sources contraindicate this point during pregnancy).

Liver Points

LIVER MERIDIAN: LEG POINTS (SHU POINTS)



Liver 3 "Great Surging" Taichong

Location: On the top of the foot, in the depression just distal to the juncture of the first and second metatarsal bones.

Actions: Smooths and relaxes Liver Qi; Calms Liver Yang (and related headaches); Moves Qi and Blood; Nourishes Liver Yin; alleviates pain (anywhere); regulates menstruation. Note: one of the most commonly needed point prescriptions in combination with Large Intestine 4, known as the "Four Gates."

Liver 4 "Middle Mound" Zhongfeng

Location: 1 cun anterior to the medial malleolus, in depression on the medial side of the tibialis anterior tendon.

Actions: Smooths and relaxes Liver Qi; Clears stagnation and heat from Liver Meridian; Strongly clears Blood Stagnation (part of Kiiko Matsumoto's protocol for Blood Stasis).

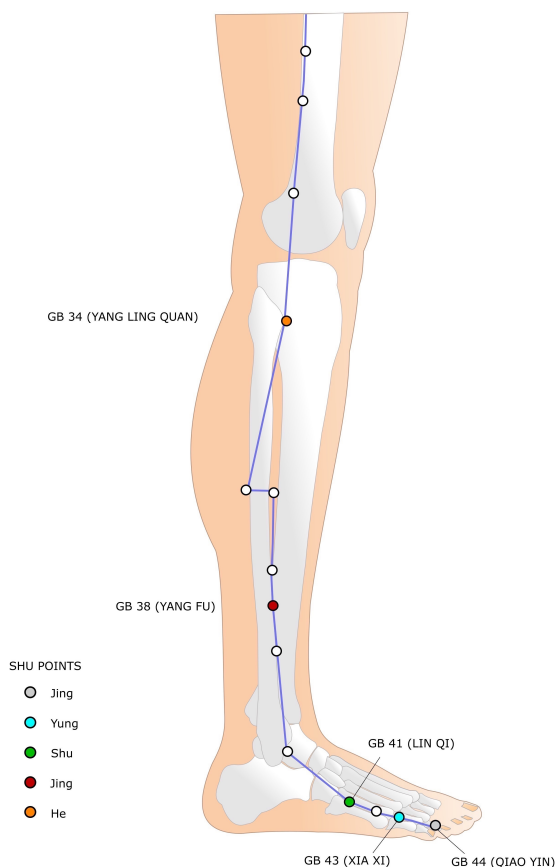
Liver 8 "Spring at the Bend" Ququan

Location: With knee flexed, Liver 8 is at the medial end of the transverse popliteal crease, posterior to the medial epicondyle of the tibia, in the depression of the anterior border of the insertions of semimembranosus and semitendinosus.

Actions: Strongly nourishes Liver Yin and Blood; smooths and regulates Liver Qi; used for nodules, cysts, especially in the uterus, ovaries, and breasts (Kiiko Matsumoto); medial knee pain.

Gall Bladder Points

GALL BLADDER MERIDIAN : LEG POINTS



Gall Bladder 34 "Yang Mound Spring" Yanglingquan

Location: In the depression anterior and distal to the head of the fibula.

Actions: Hui-meeting point for the sinews/tendons, and is main point for treating soft tissue injury and/or inflammation (ligaments, tendons, muscles); relaxes the Liver Qi; nourishes Liver Blood for any condition with Liver Blood failing to nourish tendons; benefits lateral knee.

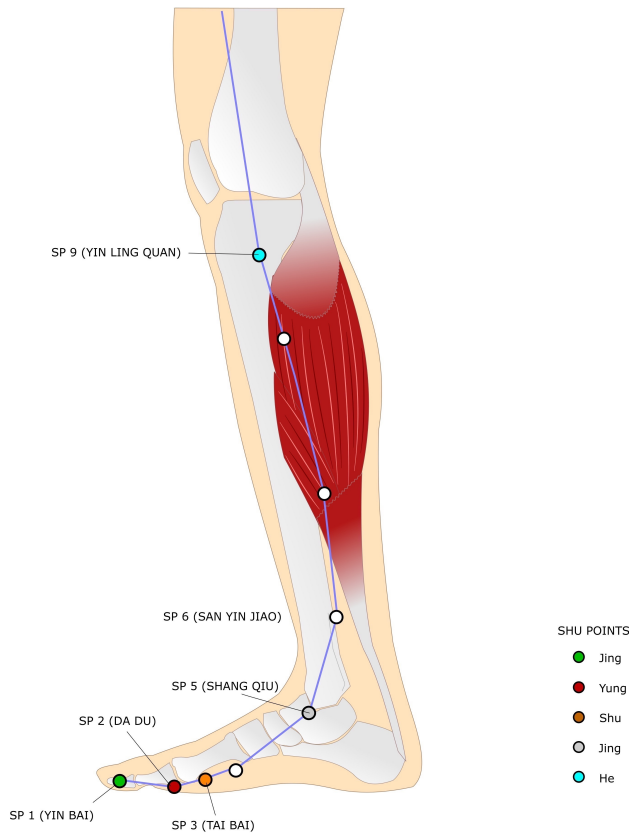
Gall Bladder 41 "Foot-Control Tears" Zulinqu

Location: In the depression lateral to the juncture of the fourth and fifth metatarsals, on the lateral side of the extensor digit minimi tendon.

Actions: Used for eye disorders, especially dry eyes or excess tearing; Smooths Liver Qi and pacifies Liver Wind; indicated for headaches/migraines, vertigo.

Spleen Points

SPLEEN MERIDIAN: LEG POINTS



Spleen 6 "Three Yin Crossing" Sanyinjiao

Location: Three cun above the tip of the medial malleolus, on posterior border of medial aspect of the tibia.

Actions: Major Point at the intersection of the three Yin Channels of the leg. Strongly nourishes Yin; strengthens Kidney Jing and Yin; regulates menses; tonifies and regulates Qi and Blood; moistens dryness; used for all Spleen disorders, reproductive imbalances, menopausal symptoms, insomnia, irritability. Contraindicated during pregnancy, but used to promote labor.

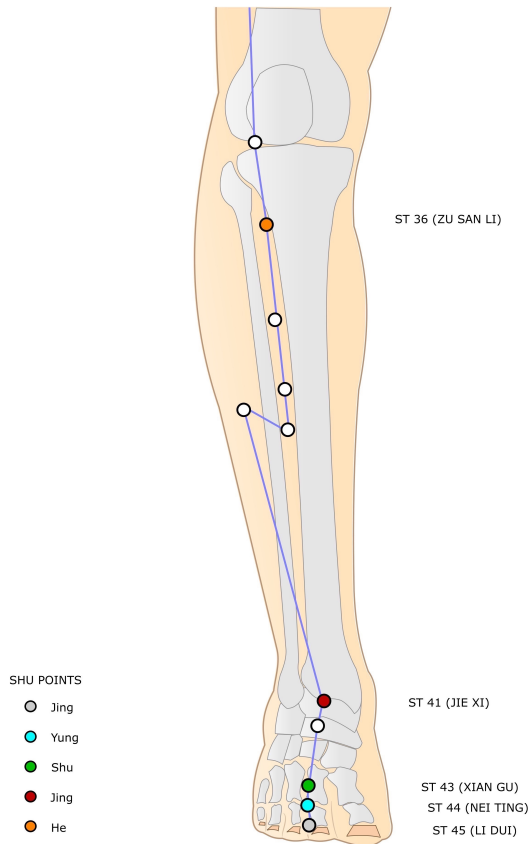
Spleen 9 "Yin Mound Spring" Yinlingquan

Location: On lower border of the medial condyle of the tibia, in the depression posterior and inferior to the medial condyle of the tibia.

Actions: Main point for transforming and clearing Dampness in body; strengthens Spleen. Used for abdominal pain, edema, Damp conditions, knee pain.

Stomach Points

STOMACH MERIDIAN: LEG POINTS



Stomach 36 "Leg Three Measure" Zusanli

Location: 3 cun below Stomach 35, one finger-breadth (middle finger) from the anterior border of the tibia.

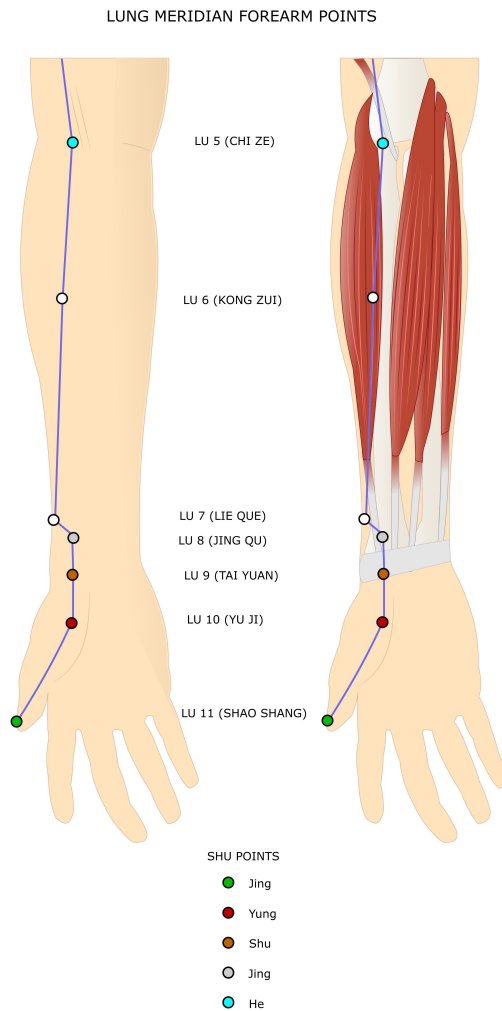
Actions: Major point for building Qi and Blood; strengthens Defensive Qi; treats a variety of digestive problems; used to invigorate and move Qi and Blood; ground and stabilize the descending function of Qi.

Stomach 40 "Plentiful Abundance" Fenglong

Location: 8 cun superior to the external malleolus, about two finger's breadth from the anterior border of the tibia.

Actions: Main point for transforming Phlegm (Damp above Stomach); Phlegm usually accumulates in the chest or lungs, as well as throat and sinuses.

Lung Points



Lung 5 "Elbow Marsh" Chize

Location: On the elbow crease, on the radial side of the tendon of the biceps brachii; located with the elbow slightly flexed.

Actions: Regulates Lung Qi; clears Lung Heat; moistens dryness; benefits the elbow; strengthens communication between the Lungs and Kidneys. Used for Lung patterns involving cough, asthma, difficulty breathing, Phlegm in throat or Lungs.

Lung 7 "Broken Sequence" Lieque

Location: 1.5 cun above the transverse crease of the wrist, superior to the styloid process of the radius.

Actions: Expels wind and defends the surface of body; Activates Defensive (Wei) Qi; regulates and circulates Lung Qi; command point for the head and posterior neck. Used for exterior "attacks," shortness of breath, asthma, cough, Lung deficiency.

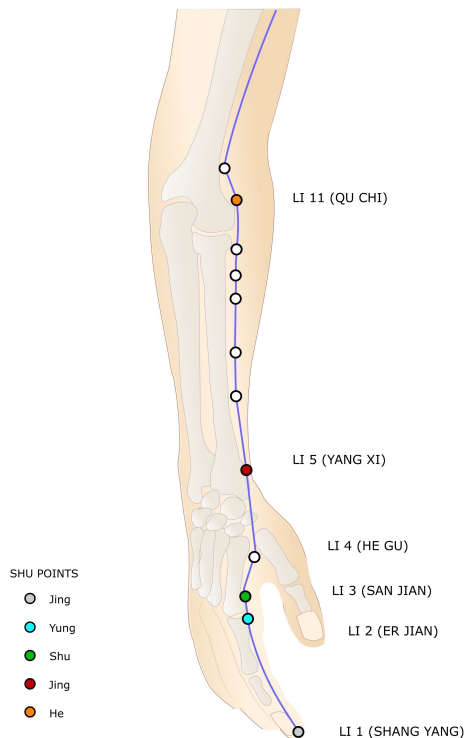
Lung 9 "Great Pool" Taiyuan

Location: On the transverse crease of the wrist, on radial side, in the depression on the radial side of the radial artery.

Actions: Main tonification point for Lung Qi; Nourishes Lung Yin; Strengthens Qi of the chest; transforms phlegm/mucous. Used for fatigue, weak cough, dry throat, colds and flu, bronchitis.

Large Intestine Points

LARGE INTESTINE MERIDIAN: FOREARM POINTS



Large Intestine 4 "Converging Valley" Hegu

Location: Approximately, in the middle of the second metacarpal bone on the radial side; or squeeze the thumb against the base of the index finger, and LI 4 is the highest point of the muscles bulge between thumb and index finger.

Actions: Command point for mouth and face (for any facial problem, tooth pain, frontal headache); moves the Qi and Blood throughout the body, paired with Liver 3 in a point combination called "Four Gates," (activating Yang Qi, used for chronic pain anywhere); regulates the Defensive Qi (main point for immunity); releases the exterior (used to dispel attacks of Wind Cold or Wind Heat, used with colds, flu, or fever); induces labor.

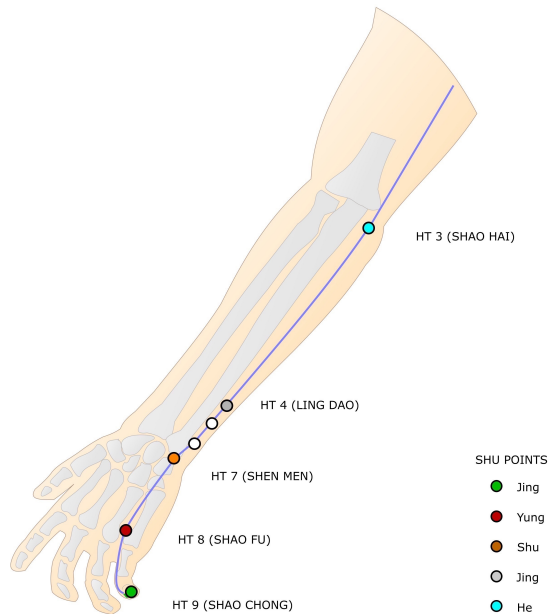
Large Intestine 11 "Curve Pool" Quchi

Location: With the elbow flexed, at the midpoint between Lung 5 and the lateral epicondyle of the humerus.

Actions: Clears Heat (used for treating fevers, heat conditions affecting the skin); strengthens Defensive Qi (immune system); regulates Qi and Blood (improving their circulation); benefits the elbow.

Heart Points

HEART MERIDIAN: MAIN POINTS OF THE FOREARM



Heart 3 "Lesser Sea" Shaohai

Location: With elbow flexed, at the medial end of the transverse cubital crease, between Pericardium 3 and the medial epicondyle of the humerus.

Actions: Calms the spirit, and clears Heat (used for stress, anxiety, excessive laughter, insomnia, nervous exhaustion, muddled thinking); activates the channel and relaxes the arm (used for tremors and numbness in elbow, forearm and hand; medial epicondylitis).

Heart 7 "Spirit Door" Shenmen

Location: At the wrist joint, in the depression on the radial side of the flexor carpi ulnaris tendon, in the depression at the proximal border of the pisiform bone.

Actions: Calms the Spirit (used for stress, anxiety, insomnia, palpitations); clears Heat and nourishes Heart Yin (used for manic episodes, irritability, emotional disturbance); regulates the Heart (used for palpitations, irregular pulse, angina, tachycardia).

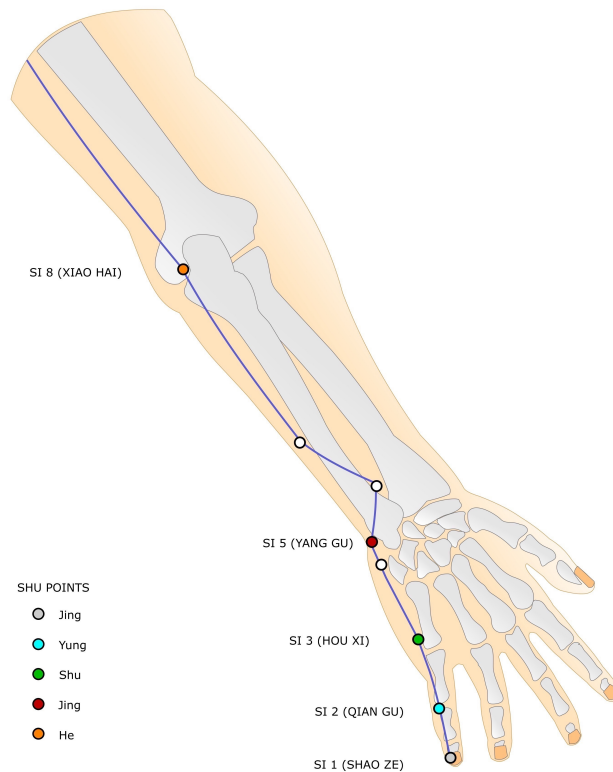
Heart 9 "Lesser Surging" Shaochong

Location: On radial side of the little finger, approximately 0.1 cun on the posterior corner of the nail.

Actions: Restores consciousness (used for coma, shock, seizures, loss of consciousness; or to wake up or sober up someone who is drunk); regulates Heart Qi and calms the Spirit (used as emergency point for heart attack, strong stimulation, in addition to calling 911 and giving CPR); clears Heat (used for fever, sore throat, agitation, irritability).

Small Intestine Points

SMALL INTESTINE MERIDIAN: FOREARM POINTS



Small Intestine 3 "Back Stream" Houxi

Location: On the ulnar side of the hand, in the depression proximal to the head of the fifth metacarpal bone, with a loose fist made.

Actions: Benefits the neck and back (used for stiff neck, pain in the back or spine, occipital headaches); opens the channel and alleviates pain (for pain in the shoulder, scapula, lateral rotators of the shoulder); clears Heat (for inflammation of the eyes, red eyes, visual dizziness).

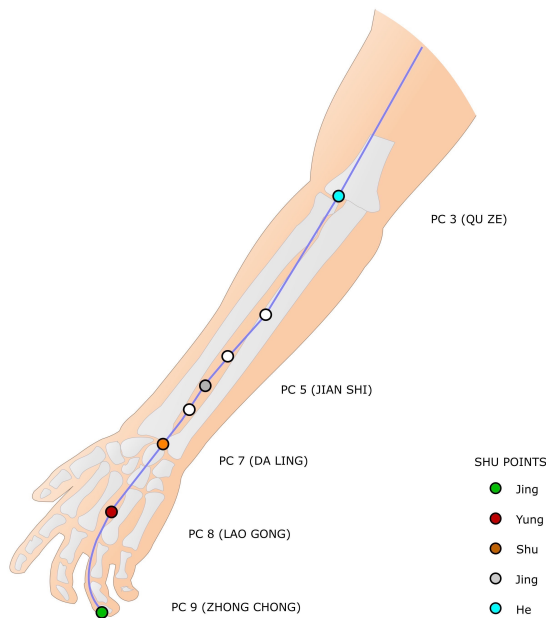
Small Intestine 11 "Celestial Gathering" Tianzong

Location: On the scapula, in the tender depression, one-third the distance from the midpoint of the inferior border of the scapular spine to the inferior angle of the scapula.

Actions: Benefits breast and promotes lactation; opens the channel and relieves pain. Used for upper back pain and stiffness, very good for neck pain, or shoulder pain.

Pericardium Points

PERICARDIUM MERIDIAN: FOREARM POINTS (SHU POINTS)



Pericardium 3 "Bend Marsh"

Location: On the transverse cubital crease, in the depression on the ulnar side of the biceps brachii tendon.

Actions: Clears the Heart (used for angina); clears Heat from the Qi and Blood (used for fever, dry mouth, thirst, irritability); clears the channel (used for pain in elbow, arm and hand).

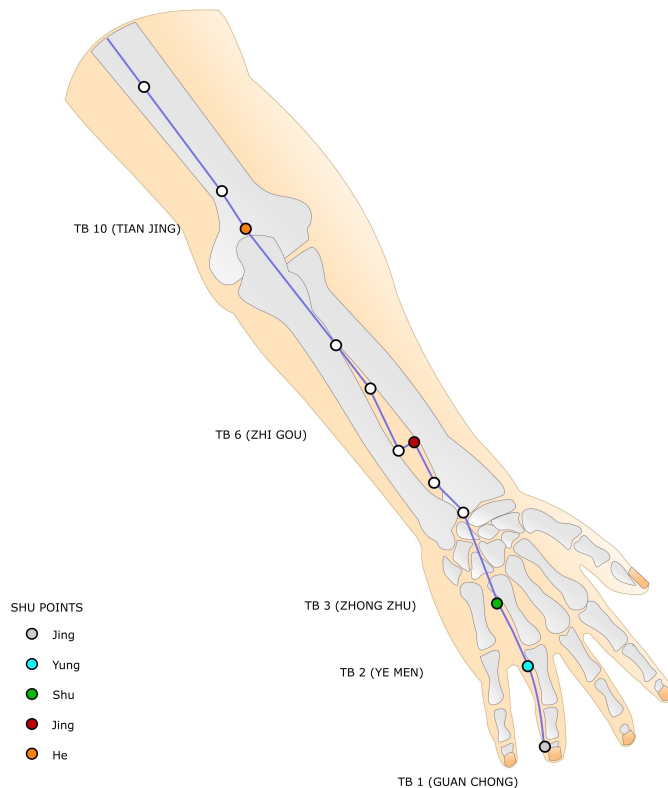
Pericardium 6 "Inner Gate" Neiguan

Location: 2 cun above the wrist crease, between the tendons of palmaris longus and flexor carpi radialis.

Actions: Opens the chest and regulates the Qi (used for chest tightness, cough with chest pain, angina, palpitations); harmonizes the Stomach (used for the nausea, seasickness, motion sickness); affects cardiovascular, digestive, nervous systems and the brain (used for insomnia, stress, irritability, nervousness); master point of the Yin Wei vessel (extraordinary vessel) and binds and connects all the yin meridians of the body; regulates the flow of Qi, Yin, and Blood in the interior of the body).

Triple Burner Points

TRIPLE BURNER (SAN JIAO) MERIDIAN: FOREARM POINTS



Triple Burner 3 "Middle Islet" Zhongzhu

Location: On the dorsum of the hand, between the fourth and fifth metacarpal bones, in the depression proximal to the metacarpo-phalangeal joints.

Actions: Benefits the ears (used for ear problems, deafness, tinnitus); activates channel and alleviates pain (used for temporal headaches, shoulder and upper back pain, sore throat).

Triple Burner 5 "Outer Gate" Waiguan

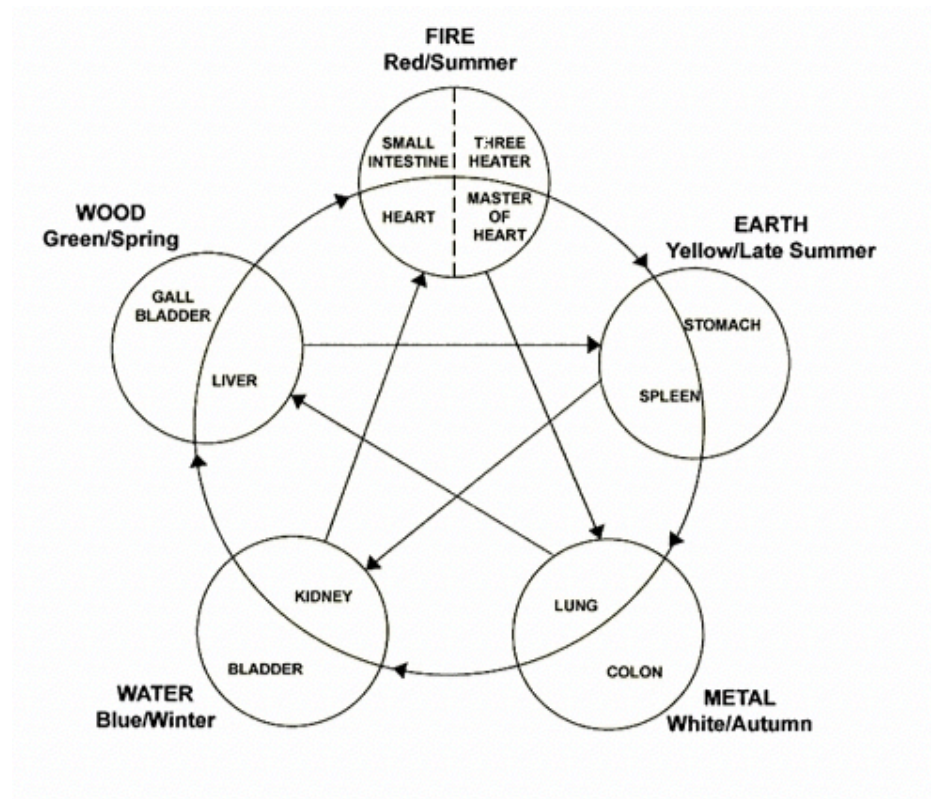
Location: 2 cun proximal to the wrist crease on the dorsum of the forearm, between the radius and ulna.

Actions: Disperses Wind (used for early stages of external invasions); Activates channel and alleviates pain (used for headaches, migraines); master point of the Yang Wei vessel (Extraordinary Vessel).

Connects all the Yang meridians of the body activating defensive Qi.

Section 5: Five Element Theory and Practice

Five Element Theory



Yin Postures by Elements

Wood: Swan, Shoelace, Square, Eye of Needle, Dragonfly, Tadpole, Frog, Outrigger, Bananasana, Side Flexion Deer

Fire: Eagle Arms, Melting Heart (with or without Namaste Palms), Quarter Dog, Twisted Tadpole (Child's Pose), Sitting Swan

Earth: Dragons (especially, Casual, Fragon, High, Dragon Tail), Saddle, Half-Saddle, Swan

Metal: Melting Heart (with our without Namaste Palms), Quarter Dog, Seal/Saddle (for upper body), Snail with Upper Arms, Sitting Swan, Open Wing

Water: Sphinx/Seal, Saddle, Butterfly, 1/2 Butterfly, 1/2 Frog, 1/2 Shoelace, Caterpillar, Dragonfly, Snail

Five Elemental Energy Chart

	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Viscera (Yin)	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lung	Kidney
Bowel (Yang)	Gall Bladder	Small Intestine	Stomach	Large Intestine	Urinary Bladder
Tissue	Tendon/Muscle	Blood/Vessels	Qi/Blood, Muscle	Skin	Bone/Teeth/Joints
Controls	Flow of Qi	Circulation of Blood	Digestion/ Production of Qi and Blood	Respiration	Reproductive organs, Lower back
Chakra	Manipura	Anahata	Manipura	Vissudhi	Muladhara/Svadisthana
Sense Organ	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ear
Liquid	Tears	Sweat	Saliva	Mucous	Urine
Nature	Birth	Grown	Mature	Harvest	Store
Nourishes	Nails	Complexion	Lips	Body Hair	Head Hair
Emotion	Anger/ Compassion	Joy-Manic/ Love	Anxiety/ Equanimity	Sorrow/ Courage	Fear/ Wisdom
Color	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Blue/Black
Season	Spring	Summer	Indian Summer	Fall	Winter
Climate	Wind	Heat	Damp	Dry	Cold
Taste	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Spicy	Salty
Sound	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Weeping	Groaning

Five Element Sequencing Application

1. **Seasonal Balance:** In any given season, design a sequence for that corresponding element. Generally speaking, within each season, that season's corresponding element can get out of balance. The theory is: Practice sequences that emphasize that element to bring it to greater balance with the other elements (*i.e.* in Winter, practice Water poses more; in Spring, practice Wood poses more).
2. **Generative Cycle:** Use the generative cycle to help support health in a given element that is imbalanced (*i.e.* Fire poses to support Earth, Water poses to support Wood).
3. **Controlling Cycle:** This is a more sophisticated application of Five Element Theory to Yin Practice. And I recommend it primarily for home self-practice. But if you assess that you have an element that is in Excess, you could choose poses from the element that Controls that element. A very common example is Excess Wood/Liver Qi Rising or Stagnation. In this case, using some Metal poses would help pacify Wood. Also, in Summer, Fire can become excessive, and Water poses can have a pacifying effect on Fire.

Five Climates and Their Influence on Body/Mind

Wind: (Liver/Wood)

- Characterized by movement that rises and falls unpredictably.
- Associated with Spring – sudden and rapid change, capricious, foreboding nature.
- Manifests in the body as jerky movement, dizziness, uncoordination, symptoms that migrate from one region to another.
- External Wind: Invades the surface of the body with soreness, achiness, itching, sensitivity, or twitching.
- Internal Wind: Labile emotions, vertigo, tremors, headaches, seizures, and strokes.
- Because Wind can penetrate the body's defensive energy, it can create a portal through which the other climates enter the body.

Heat (Heart/Fire)

- Nature of Heat is to accelerate metabolic activity, dilate blood vessels, stimulate circulation. Heat rises and moves out to the surface. Summer is dominated by Heat.
- If Heat becomes excessive, it generates inflammation and fever with redness, swelling, and pain.
- Hot conditions are associated with thirst, dryness, constipation, difficult urination, agitation, desire for cold, aversion to warm foods and drinks and climate.

Dampness (Spleen/Earth)

- Nature is to sink and accumulate, like a stagnant swamp. Characterized by abnormal buildup of fluids or excess secretions.
- It appears as swelling and a sense of fullness and heaviness, locally or throughout the body.
- Late summer is dominated by humidity, and associated with Dampness.
- On surface of body, shows up as oily skin, sticky perspiration, edema, and swelling around the joints.
- Internally, shows up with phlegm, abundant discharge of mucus, water retention, and edema in abdomen and extremities. Heaviness also characterizes Dampness.
- Produced by dairy products, starchy and sugary foods.

Dryness (Lung/Metal)

- Nature is to wither and shrivel. Damages fluids and manifests as symptoms of dehydration.
- Brittle hair and nails; cracked and wrinkled skin and mucous membranes, irritated eyes, dry stool and constipation, lack of perspiration, and scanty urine.
- Dominates in Autumn, associated with Metal.

Cold (Kidney/Water)

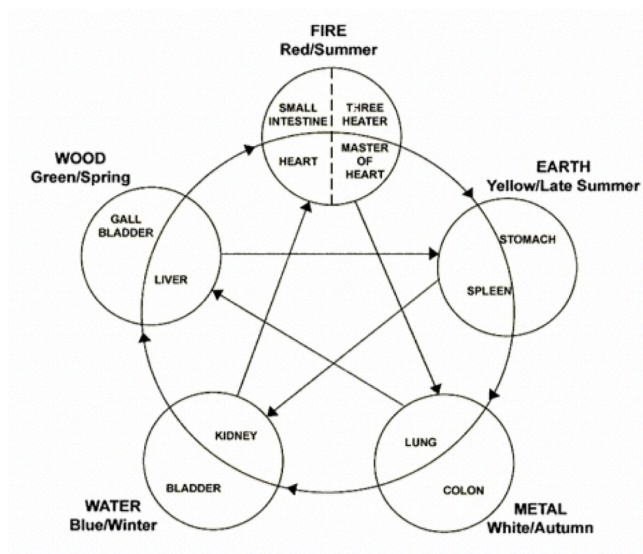
- Nature is to slow things down by chilling them. Cold depresses metabolism and slows circulation. Winter is dominated by Cold, corresponding to Water Phase.
- Externally, Cold attacks the surface of the skin; muscles contract with shivering and goose-bumps.
- Can arise internally from deficient Heat, or ingestion of excessively Cold food and/or liquid.
- Accompanying Cold, there is desire for heat and a craving of warm foods and liquids.

The Five Emotions

(from *Between Heaven and Earth*, Korngold and Beinfield)

1. **Anger (Liver)** causes energy to rise – it tends to flare up and lash out with sudden explosiveness, like the windy storms of spring, unpredictable and intense.
2. **Joy (Heart)** causes energy to disperse – it tends to dissipate and be lost. Being overcome by joy can leave a person giddy and weak like the intense heat of summer, exhausted and drained.
3. **Rumination (Spleen)** causes energy to slow down – sluggish movement tends toward stagnation, leaving one lazy and inert, like the humidity in late summer.
4. **Sorrow (Lungs)** causes energy to stop – it tends to constrict and close down. Imprisoned by grief, one is cut off from life; like the drying leaves of autumn, feelings wither and motivation crumples.
5. **Fear (Kidneys)** causes energy to sink. When survival is threatened, one becomes petrified with fright and loses control... literally frozen with fear.

Wood Sequence



5 Element Considerations in Sequencing for Wood Emphasis

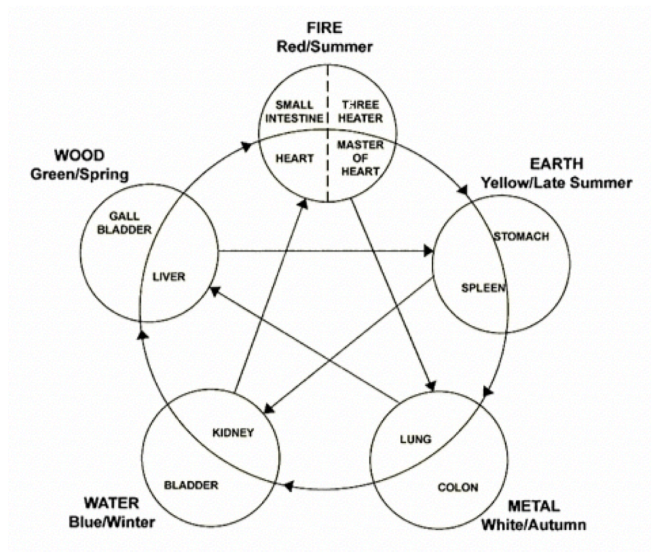
1. Use **Wood** postures to either disperse Wood excess or tonify Wood deficiency. ****
2. Use **Fire** postures to subdue excess Wood energy (not very common).
3. Use **Earth** postures to strengthen Earth if Wood is over-controlling Earth.
4. Use **Metal** postures to control excess Wood. ****
5. Use **Water** postures to tonify deficient Wood, and or cool excess fire from Wood stagnation. ****

**** Indicates strong recommendation.

Wood Sequence

1. **Virasana Neck Release**
2. **Quarter Dog** (Metal - Lungs)
3. **Outrigger** (Wood - Liver)
4. **Tadpole to Frog** (Wood - Liver)
5. **Sphinx/Seal** (Water - Kidney)
6. **Swan** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
 - **Square with Side Flexion** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
 - Repeat second side
7. **Dragonfly with Side Flexion** (Wood - Liver; Water - Kidney and Bladder)
8. **Bananasana** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
9. **Reclining Twists**
10. **Savasana**

Fire and Metal Sequence



5 Element Considerations in Sequencing for Fire

(I combined a Fire and Metal in one sequence because it is nearly impossible to isolate one meridian of the upper body with Yin Yoga postures).

1. Use **Wood** postures to tonify deficient Fire.
2. Use **Fire** postures to disperse or tonify Fire. ****
3. Use **Earth** postures to draw excess from Fire, where a child can drain the parent. ****
4. Use **Metal** postures if excess Fire is over-controlling Metal, weakening it.
5. Use **Water** postures to tonify Water to control excess Fire. ****

**** Indicates strong recommendation.

5 Element Considerations in Sequencing for Metal

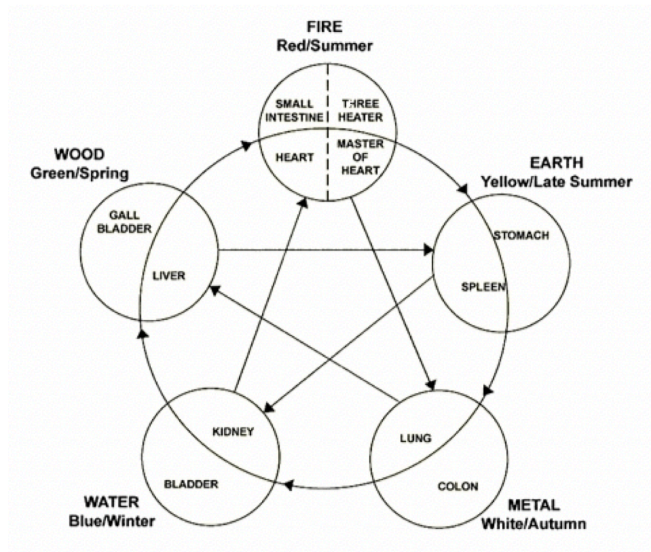
1. Use **Wood** postures to disperse Wood if Wood is excess and backing into Metal.
2. Use **Fire** postures to adjust Fire's level of control over Metal.
3. Use **Earth** postures to tonify and strengthen Metal. ****
4. Use **Metal** postures to strengthen or disperse Metal. ****
5. Use **Water** postures – Dispersing Water can drain excess Metal, or tonify Water so that it doesn't drain the mother (Metal) ****

**** Indicates strong recommendation.

Fire and Metal Sequence

1. **Supine Butterfly** (with upper body: Fire - Heart; Metal - Lungs)
2. **Side Flexion Deer** (side body: Wood - Gall Bladder; arms: Fire - Heart and Small Intestine)
3. **Sitting Swan** (inner arms: Fire - Heart and Pericardium; Metal - Lungs)
4. **Dragon** (Earth; Spleen and Stomach)
 - **Inside Dragon**
 - **Twisted Dragon**
 - **Dragon Tail**
 - **Down Dog**
 - **Child's Pose**
 - Repeat
5. **Twisted Tadpole** (Fire - Heart and Small Intestine; Metal - Lungs and Large Intestine)
6. **Down Dog**
7. **Saddle for Upper Body** (Metal - Lungs)
8. **Shoelace**
 - **Side Flexion** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
 - **With Eagle Arms** (Fire - Heart and Small Intestine)
9. **1/2 Shoelace** or **1/2 Butterfly** (Water - Bladder)
10. **Snail with Hands Clasped** (if possible) (Water - Bladder; Metal - Lungs)
11. **Reclining Twist for Upper Body** (Metal - Lungs)
12. **Savasana/Pentacle** (Metal - Lungs)

Earth Sequence



5 Element Considerations in Sequencing for Earth

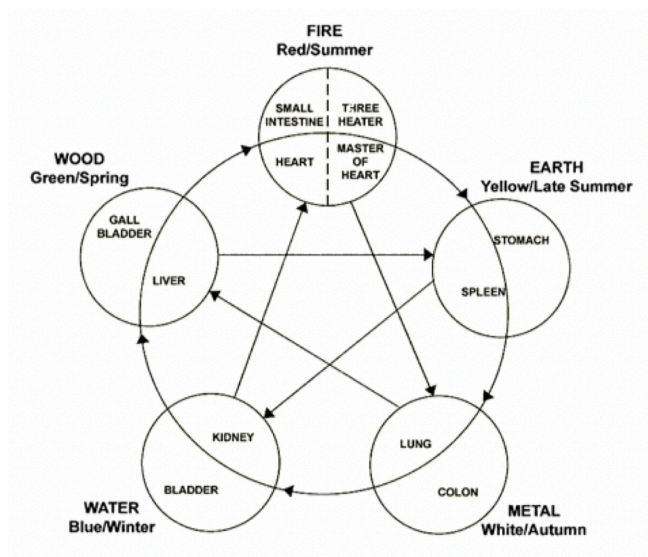
1. Use **Wood** postures with intention to disperse Wood if over-controlling Earth (very common). ****
2. Use **Fire** postures to tonify and strengthen Earth deficiency. ****
3. Use **Earth** postures to tonify deficient Earth. ****
4. Disperse **Metal** to prevent excess Metal from draining the mother.
5. Disperse **Water** to help Earth control excess Water.

**** Indicates strong recommendation.

Earth Sequence

1. **Tadpole** (Earth - Spleen; Wood - Liver)
2. **Cat Tail on Side** (Earth - Spleen and Stomach; Wood - Gall Bladder)
3. **Dragon** (Earth - Spleen and Stomach)
 - **Inside**
 - **Casual**
 - **Fragon**
 - **Down Dog**
 - **Child's Pose**
4. **Swan** (Wood - Gall Bladder; Earth - Spleen and Stomach)
5. **Melting Heart with Namaste Palms** (Fire - Heart and Small Intestine)
6. **1/2 Saddle** (Earth - Spleen and Stomach)
7. **Eye of Needle** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
8. **Caterpillar** (Water - Bladder)
9. **Reclining Twists**
10. **Savasana**

Water Sequence



5 Element Considerations in Sequencing for Water

1. Disperse **Wood** when excess Wood is draining the mother. ****
2. Disperse **Fire** when Water is not controlling excess Fire.
3. Disperse **Earth** if Earth is over-controlling Water deficiency.
4. Tonify **Metal** to strengthen deficient Water. ****
5. Use **Water** to strengthen or disperse Water. ****

**** Indicates strong recommendation.

Water Sequence

1. **Butterfly** (Water - Kidneys and Bladder; Wood - Gall Bladder and Liver)
2. **Sphinx and Seal** (Water - Bladder)
3. **Open Wing** (Metal - Lungs)
4. **Saddle** (Water - Kidneys; Earth - Spleen and Stomach)
5. **Shoelace** (Wood - Gall Bladder)
6. **1/2 Frog** (Water - Bladder)
7. **Dragon Three Ways** (Water - Bladder and Kidneys; Wood - Liver)
8. **Reclining Twists**
9. **Savasana**

Resources

Books:

1. *Wood Becomes Water*, Gloria Reichstein
2. *The Spark in the Machine*, Daniel Keown
3. *The Web That Has No Weaver*, Ted Kaptchuk
4. *Between Heaven and Hearth*, Efrem Korngold and Harriet Beinfield
5. *Energy Medicine, A Scientific Basis*, James Oschman

Apps:

1. Visual Acupuncture
2. A Manual of Acupuncture