

# 1. Yin and Yang, the Way of the Skies and Earth



陰陽者天地之道也，萬物之綱紀也，變化之父母，  
生殺之本始，神明之府也。治病必求於本。

YIN AND YANG FORM THE WAY of the skies and earth.

They make up the rules and patterns for the myriad creatures.

They are the father and mother

Of all change and transformation,

The root origin of living and killing,

They are the treasury of a clear mind.

In treating sickness you must seek for the root.

Zhang Zhicong: The root means the root of Yin and Yang. The *zangfu*, qi and blood, inner and outer, upper and lower divisions of man all find their root in Yin and Yang. While without we are assailed by the wind, cold, summer warmth and damp, the four seasons and *wuxing* again derive totally from the two qi of Yin and Yang. Whether concerned with treating disease through herbs or diet, or applying the needle, whether you are examining colour and pulse or making a medical case from their social standing, it all lies in the province of Yin and Yang. Thus the text says, 'to treat sickness, you must seek for the root'.

Li Zhongzi: Unfathomable in change and transformation, this is the meaning of 'mind'; materiality flowing into form, this is the meaning of 'clear'. A treasury signifies a flowing into form, change and transformation. Everything can be deduced from this.

Li Zhongzi: All humankind is beset by sickness. Although it has no single cause, sickness either belongs to the category of the weak (*xu*) or strong (*shi*), cold or heat, the qi or blood, to the *zang* or *fu*, and all are contained in the Yin and

Yang. For that reason, although our understanding of sickness alters constantly, Yin and Yang remain the root.

故積陽為天，積陰為地。陰靜陽燥，陽生陰長，陽殺陰藏。

This being so an accumulation of Yang forms the skies  
While an accumulation of the Yin forms the earth.  
The Yin is still and the Yang impetuous,  
The Yang gives birth and the Yin matures.  
The Yang to destroy, the Yin to conceal.

Li Zhongzi: The Yin itself never acts singly – it follows the Yang then acts. Just as the 'shutting away and storage' of the cold winter follows on entirely from the destruction wrought by the autumn storms and frosts. So it says in the text: 'The Yang to destroy, the Yin to conceal.'

陽化氣，陰成形。

The Yang provides a transforming qi,  
The Yin completes the form.

Li Zhongzi: Yang has no form, so it makes up the transforming qi. Yin has substance, so it completes the forms of things.

寒極生熱，熱極生寒。

Extreme cold generates heat,  
Extreme heat generates cold.

Li Zhongzi: The extreme cold of winter brings about the warmth of spring and summer. The extreme heat of summer brings about the cold of autumn and winter.

寒氣生濁，熱氣生清。

Cold qi creates turbidity,  
Heated qi creates clarity.

Li Zhongzi: Cold belongs to the Yin, so it creates turbidity. Heat belongs to the Yang, so it creates clarity.

清氣在下，則生飧泄，濁氣在上，則生脹脹。

While a clear qi is found below,  
It creates diarrhoea with undigested food.

When a turbid qi is found above,  
It creates staring eyes and a distending headache.

Li Zhongzi: The clear Yang should ascend. As it sinks below, it cannot ascend and food becomes undigested. The turbid Yin should descend. As it reverses above, it can no longer descend. It turns into staring eyes and a distending headache. The chest and diaphragm feel swollen and full.

There is one grand principle common to all threads of Chinese medicine – the principle of Yin and Yang (陰陽 *yinyang*). Along with the idea of the Tao (or ‘Way’) and the qi, Yin and Yang give us an explanation for how the world works. The *yinyang* signifies a complementary but shifting balance between contraries – as it forms ‘the Way of the skies and earth’. The phenomenon of the circling skies is the picture of change – and yet this change itself is also constant. In addition, within the body, Yin and Yang come together and fall apart, rise and fall – as in the moving blood (Yin) and qi (Yang) in the *zang* 臟, or solid, and *fu* 腑, more hollow, organs – and yet their principle remains the same. The opening line above, ‘Yin and Yang form the Way of the skies and earth’, begins *Suwen* 5, entitled ‘On the Resonant Phenomena of Yin and Yang’. This chapter explains that Yin and Yang are the ‘treasury of a clear mind’ – and also that in order to treat sickness, you ‘must seek for the root’ 必求於本 *biqu yuben*, the root in the Yin and Yang.

Critically, the Han scholars who assembled the *Suwen* developed *yinyang* and *wuxing* thinking to categorise and synthesise all data. Yin and Yang formed the backbone on which could be hung traditional Chinese science. The exigencies of the *yinyang* grew into an intricate but vastly flexible system, enabling the pigeonholing of experience – making best use of a searching intellect. The *yinyang* tool allows work on ourselves at the same time as it helps us observe the universe. This is truly an ‘investigation of things’ or *gewu* (see earlier). The implication is that to learn medicine correctly, we must be self-reflective. As we gain a clearer view of the world, so also, concurrently, we gain insight into ourselves. This is the feat of Chinese traditional

medicine – that it compounds both a Confucian self-scrutiny and a Taoist fascination with how life comes about. Yin and Yang *by nature* imply reflective practice. Their dialogue implies work done towards ‘a clear mind’ 神明 *shenming*. *Shenming* has many translations, but it is obvious from Li Zhongzi’s commentary that in this context it means clear thinking.

### THE *YINYANG*

<i>the Way</i>	of the skies and earth
<i>the rules and patterns</i>	for the myriad creatures
<i>the father and mother</i>	of all change and transformation
<i>the root origin</i>	of living and killing
<i>the treasury</i>	of a clear mind



## 2. Yin and Yang, Water, Fire, Qi and Flavours



清陽為天，濁陰為地，地氣上為雲，天氣下為雨。

THE CLEAR YANG FORMS THE SKIES,

The turbid Yin represents the earth.

The earthly qi rises above to form the clouds,

The qi of the skies descends as rain.

Li Zhongzi: The skies and earth are spoken of in terms of 'clouds and rain'; the human body is spoken of in terms of *jing* and *qi*. The human body is as one single small universe. Now do you understand?

故清陽出上竅，濁陰出下竅，清陽發腠理，濁陰走五臟。

清陽實四肢，濁陰歸六腑。

The clear Yang comes out from the upper openings,

The turbid Yin comes out from the lower openings.

The clear Yang develops into the texture of the skin,

While the turbid Yin runs back to the five *zang*.

The clear Yang gives substance to the four limbs,

While the turbid Yin returns to the six *fu*.

Li Zhongzi: The Yang entirely establishes without, the Yin entirely establishes within.

水為陰，火為陽。

陽為氣，陰為味，味歸形，形歸氣。

Water is Yin; fire is Yang.

The Yang forms the qi,

The Yin forms the tastes.  
 The tastes go back to the physical body,  
 So the body goes back to the qi.

Li Zhongzi: Water seeps below and is cooling, thus Yin. Fire blazes above and is heating, thus Yang. What blazes above is at the point of sinking below and what is seeping below is at the point of rising above. This is the meaning of water and fire mixing together and triumphing in the body. The kidneys deal with water and within this water are born our qi, namely the 'true fire'. The heart deals with fire and within this fire is born a fluid, namely the 'true waters'. Yang in Yin and Yin in Yang. Waters and fires, Yin and Yang both linked in the body. This you must understand.

Li Zhongzi: The tastes 'go back to the physical body' because food entering the mouth creates blood and builds up the physical form. The body 'goes back to the qi' because blood is entirely dependent on qi. As the qi is strong it can, of itself, create blood. If the qi is injured, the blood as a consequence will decline.

氣歸精，精歸化。

The qi goes back to the *jing*;  
 The *jing* goes back to the transformations.

Zhang Jiebin: The qi here is the 'true qi' 真氣 *zhenqi*, that which we receive at birth. It combines together with the qi from food to fill up the body. The human body is composed of *jing* and qi. From the qi we gain transformation. Thus the qi goes back to the *jing*.

Li Zhongzi: The qi here is the 'source qi' 元氣 *yuanqi* we are born with. It combines with the acquired qi we get from food to fill up the body...the *jing* is the 'true lead of Kan's palace', the single line in the trigram Water, and the first and foremost evidence of our oneness with nature. As this *jing* is bestowed upon us, so it is able to effect all transformations of life. This is the root cause of all life.

精食氣，形食味。

The *jing* feeds off the qi,  
 The physical body feeds off the tastes.

Li Zhongzi: The qi acts as mother to the *jing*. The tastes we eat form the foundation for the body. So the body feeds off them, just as a child feeds off its mother's milk.

化生精，氣生形。

The transformations are created from *jing*.  
So qi creates the physical body.

味傷形，氣傷精。

The tastes may injure the body,  
The qi may injure the *jing*.

Li Zhongzi: The tastes fundamentally 'go back to the physical body'. If perhaps the tastes are not checked, instead they injure the body. The qi fundamentally 'goes back to the *jing*'. If perhaps the qi is not harmonised, instead it injures the *jing*.

精化為氣，氣傷於味。

The *jing* transforms into qi,  
The qi is injured by the tastes.

Li Zhongzi: The qi fundamentally 'goes back to the *jing*' – so it acts as mother to the *jing*. Here it says 'the *jing* transforms into qi', meaning that *jing* may also create qi. For instance, if you do not show a great fondness for sexual activity it means your qi may find a way to flourish. Water and fire are linked at root. This is the significance of the above text where it mentions the image of 'the skies and the earth, clouds and rain'.

陰味出下竅，陽氣出上竅。

The Yin tastes come out from the lower openings,  
The Yang qi comes out from the upper openings.

味厚者為陰，薄為陰之陽。氣厚者為陽，薄為陽之陰。

味厚則泄，薄則通。氣薄則發泄，厚則發熱。

Tastes which thicken up are more Yin,  
Those which thin out are more Yang than Yin.  
Qi which thickens up is more Yang,  
That which thins out is more Yin than Yang.  
Tastes which thicken up are passed out below,  
As they thin out they permeate the whole body.  
Qi which thins out is also eliminated.  
If it thickens up it develops as heat.

Li Zhongzi: Qi which thins out can be eliminated outside; qi which thickens up can develop into heat.

壯火之氣衰，少火之氣壯，壯火食氣，氣食少火，  
壯火散氣，少火生氣。

In a vigorous fire the qi is weakened,

In a lesser fire the qi is strengthened.

A vigorous fire consumes the qi,

The qi consumes a lesser fire.

A vigorous fire scatters the qi,

While a lesser fire generates qi.

Li Zhongzi: Fire means Yang qi...if things are to be born, they must be rooted in the Yang. But only the fire of a peaceful Yang can give birth to things. A blazing fire will harm them. Therefore if the fire is too strong, the qi instead declines; if the fire is peaceful, the qi strengthens. A vigorous fire scatters the qi...so it 'consumes the qi'; a lesser fire generates qi...so the 'qi consumes a lesser fire'.

Li Zhongzi: Therefore if the fire is too strong, instead the qi declines; if the fire is peacefully balanced, the qi is strengthened.

陰勝則陽病，陽勝則陰病，陽勝則熱，陰勝則寒。  
重寒則熱，重熱則寒。

As Yin predominates, so Yang is sick,

As Yang predominates, so Yin is sick.

As Yang predominates there is heat,

As Yin predominates there is cold.

Severe cold generates heat,

Severe heat generates cold.

Li Zhongzi: As Yin and Yang intermingle, so they arrive at the norm. An imbalance in either precipitates sickness. In the interchange of Yin and Yang, water at its extreme resembles fire, while fire at its extreme resembles water. When Yang is full it cuts out Yin, and when Yin is full it cuts out Yang. So then there appear the symptoms of real cold within and false heat outside, or real heat within and false cold outside. If you do not discern how they have interchanged, but recklessly hand over the prescription, it is like deepening the water or building up the fire! Although you may be wise in learning, you cannot save them from disaster.

寒傷形, 熱傷氣.

Coldness injures the body,

Heat injures the qi.

Li Zhongzi: Coldness is Yin and the body is also Yin...heat is Yang and the qi is also Yang.

氣傷痛, 形傷腫,

If the qi is injured, there is pain,

If the body is injured, it creates swelling.

Li Zhongzi: The qi excels at passing through. If it is injured it may become blocked and cannot pass through, causing pain.

故先痛而後腫者氣傷形也,

先腫而後痛者形傷氣也.

Thus if first pain and later swelling,

It is the qi injuring the body,

If first swelling and later pain,

It is the body injuring the qi.

喜怒傷氣, 寒暑傷形.

Pleasure and anger injure the qi,

Cold and summer heat injure the body.

The Yang forms the skies above, while the Yin consolidates the earth beneath. In the body, they appear as qi 氣 and *jing* 精. This is the basic sense of the atmosphere in our planet and life in our bodies. Though it is true the clear Yang forms the skies, according to the principle of the *yinyang*, where there is Yang, Yin cannot be far behind. Water is Yin, so we have rain and clouds. This thinking is further developed. For instance, in the body (the small 'heaven and earth') the turbid Yin 'comes out from the lower openings' through our bowels and bladder, while the clear Yang rises to the head and brightens the face and senses, to form our perception of the world.

Yin, being thicker, forms into tastes and food. But the Yang, being synonymous with qi, moves to transform food into blood,

and so blood (Yin) and qi (Yang) circulate around together. In addition, the qi 'goes back to the *jing*'. They have their ultimate source in the kidneys. *Jing* is stored in the kidneys – and has much to do with fertility and development. The loins are the powerhouse of the body.

In brief, the tastes we eat 'go back to the physical body' just as food creates our physique, and the body 'goes back to the qi' just as the Yin blood is entirely dependent on the Yang qi. In addition, this qi 'goes back to the *jing*' just as qi depends for its power on *jing* – and the *jing* 'goes back to the transformations', just as it is responsible for all life. Yet in reciprocal fashion, the *jing* also 'feeds off the qi', as both qi and *jing* are bound together. The body 'feeds off the tastes' just as it depends on food for its survival. Last, the transformations of life are 'created from *jing*', just as all life comes from the central line of Kan ☵ (a symbol for the kidney Yang); and qi 'creates the physical body' just as it is able to carry into material form the potentiality of *jing*.

In the next few sections, this tortuous thinking is condensed further. Fundamentally, it reiterates the nature of the Yang. A *vigorous* Yang (qi or fire) can only decline – it is a *lesser* Yang which has the chance of growth and getting stronger. This is *yinyang* thinking. Within the kidneys, the real fire warms up the water; this is what keeps us warm and alive. Within the heart, the real water cools the fire; this is what keeps us 'in a cool temper'. This is how we achieve balance – in physiological terms: it describes the promotion of the *yinyang* homeostasis. Be watchful of the Yang, for it is a general truth in therapy that gentle encouragement can work better than enforced change – it can also be more invigorating! The qi 'consumes a lesser fire' because it literally 'feeds on', that is, develops from, a lesser fire.

Li Zhongzi makes the same point: 'If the fire is too strong, instead the qi declines; if the fire is peacefully balanced, the qi is strengthened.' He goes on:

The Yang qi means those warm and comfortable energies felt in the human body. If these ever terminate, the body will cool

down and life will come to an end. The *Neijing* repeatedly states this one simple truth. It intends mankind to become skilful at tending to the fire. Only a lesser fire becomes strong – a vigorous fire will decline. You must especially be skilful at regulating the flame and its heat.

Both Li Zhongzi and Zhang Jiebin see ‘fire’ and the Yang qi of the body as synonymous. They believe a lesser fire strengthens the body, reflecting the ‘warming and tonifying’ school of the Ming herbalists. It is their contention that a vigorous fire must be short-lived – whilst a gentle fire has a chance to grow. Li Zhongzi takes our natural birthright, or ‘real fire’ 真火 *zhen huo*, as the very stuff of our physiology. ‘Real’ 真 *zhen* here means ‘original, untarnished, recovered’. These ideas were made much of by writers on *neidan* 內丹 or ‘internal alchemy’.

#### A VIGOROUS FIRE, A LESSER FIRE

<i>a vigorous fire</i>	the qi is weakened
<i>a lesser fire</i>	the qi is strengthened
<i>a vigorous fire</i>	consumes the qi
<i>the qi energy</i>	consumes a lesser fire
<i>a vigorous fire</i>	scatters the qi
<i>a lesser fire</i>	generates the qi

