THE WORLD OF *DAO*: MOVEMENT IN CHINESE MEDICINE

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Long before Chinese medicine had developed into a clinical system of symptom-sign complexes, it arose as a natural philosophy of life in health and disease. Far longer than classic texts such as *Dao De Jing* (*The Classic of the Way and Its Virtue*) and the *Zhuangzi* have inspired the *Daoist* religion, they have formed the basis of personal cultivation in the quest to understand life. The theme of interpreting *Dao De Jing* following the commentary of *Heshanggong,* within the microcosm of individual human life, has remained important for nearly two thousand years.

Chinese medicine developed in part as a practical application of this "*Daoist* thought," where aspirants focus on the process of disease, and how to support health. Such practitioners seek to understand the subtle dynamics that create manifest reality, and develop treatment strategies focused on resolving its causes. This aspiration can be approached to some extent through creative use of the Five Phases, though this approach limits one's focus to only a portion of the complex dynamics that create each individual's experience. Each being's life combines the unique *jing*-essence that comes out from the inside, and the collection of all interactions that individual has with the people, circumstances, and events of the outside world.

While the Five Phases differentiate how and where *jing*-essence disseminates to support each individual's life, this collection of symbols does not address the fundamental vital movements of post-natal *qi*. This paper begins with a discussion of the cognitive process practitioners of classical Chinese natural philosophy have used for more than two thousand years to open their perception of the subtle dynamics of all phenomena, including individual life. Classical Chinese medicine based on *Neijing* combines the Five Phases with the Six Divisions into a larger and more developed picture of individual life, than either the Five Phases alone or the modern clinical doctrine. Cultivating that "larger picture" of life expands the options practitioners can consider in formulating treatment strategies, including ones based on the multifaceted roles of the channel complexes.

The titles of many medical texts were referenced in the Records of the Grand Historian (*Shiji*, 109-91 B.C.E.) of Sima Qian from the early Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 9 C.E.), but few of those texts survived the book burnings marking the end of the Han era (circa 220 C.E.). While the classical period of the Han Dynasties was apparently quite prolific, the history of Chinese medicine has had only the two volumes of *Neijing* among those earliest recorded texts as an ongoing wellspring. Yet, this singular resource has degraded during the long history of Chinese medicine, as many of the subtle and profound ideas of *Neijing* have been eliminated from modern clinical doctrines.

My first presentation ("The Living Systems of Acupuncture Channels") focused on one important idea rooted in *Neijing* that was eliminated from the core of Chinese medical doctrine about a thousand years ago. The central roles the "secondary vessels" serve in supporting the continuous flow of *qi* through the primary channels cannot be found in contemporary Chinese

medical doctrine, which focuses instead on classifying the manifestations of distress that overtly affect the *zangfu* in regulating the physical humors of life. The subtle classical idea of individuals using the channel complexes to condition the intrinsic and autonomic functions of *wei qi* and to suspend unresolved pathogenic factors into physical humors and displace them into storage reservoirs have been replaced by the far simpler theory of the external-internal relationship between the (primary) channels and the *zangfu*-viscera & bowels.

Alas, contemporary Chinese medical theory doesn't address how individuals preserve the vital continuous flow of *qi* in the primary channels while they face constant "exposure" to both external and internal pathogenic factors. Chinese medical thinking has moved away from that obvious experiential challenge, and been replaced with various schools of clinical application. Practitioners generally shift away from pursuing Chinese medicine as natural philosophy in the face of an overwhelming amount of clinical information to learn. If one aspires to "learn" for the purposes of recall in clinical circumstances all its information, there is certainly far more than one could master in several lifetimes.

Many historical forces have contributed to the evolution of Chinese medicine. They include the prolific growth of medical practice as a livelihood, and the vastly different levels of training among its practitioners. During the Song Era (960-1179), Imperial edicts were promulgated to assure a certain minimal standard of eduction required to practice, making medicine into a regulated profession. Neo-Confuscian scholars of that period who were also government administrators, such as Zhu Xi (1130-1200), also initiated the Chinese version of "evidence based medicine" in setting out to establish the intrinsic functions of each individual point through extensive empirical study of healthy experimental subjects.

Those empirical investigations were funded by the Imperial government, in part to mollify the class of Confuscian scholars under reigns of foreign origin: the Jurchen conquerers from central Asia formed the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) and the Mongols from the north formed the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). They were eventually published in texts such as the *Zhen Jiu Da Quan* (*Summary of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*) by Xu Feng (1439), *Zhen Jiu Ju Ying (The Best of Acupuncture and Moxibustion)* by Gao Wu (1529), and finally the *Zhen Jiu Da Cheng* (*The Great Successes of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*) by Yang Ji-Zhou (1601), which became the foundation of acupuncture for the past several centuries.

While we may sympathize with the ideal of securing public health by requiring a minimum standard of training for physicians, we also recognize that standardization and consequent orthodoxy created a particularly systematic approach to medicine based on the *zangfu*. Since the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), acupuncture has largely forsaken its philosophical roots to become an empirical science. Contemporary practitioners are taught to focus clinically on managing the vital humors (*qi*, blood, and fluids) that sustain individual life. We study how to manage the function of the *zangfu* (viscera and bowels) with the points of the primary channels, rather than tangling with the more complicated channel complexes.

Rather than simply classifying the manifestations of distress into symptom-sign complexes and treating to manage its expression, the highest expression of Chinese medicine uncovers each individual's central blocks and stimulates their release. While individuals live, they all have the

potential to effect profound healing, through fundamental transformation of their lives. Practitioners of classical Chinese medicine seek to discern ways to facilitate that profoundly individual process, and the possibilities are limitless.

Yet, profound healing sometimes includes uncomfortable process. These are often characterized by episodes when individuals expel previously suspended and tolerated pathogenic factors. While that process is often called a "healing crisis," the situation only appears "critical" when practitioners don't educate their patients concerning the vitally important work being done, or when the patient's embodied spirit is resisting the requisite transformation. However, when practitioners understand the true nature of many pathologies as the accumulation of unresolved pathogenic factors and eventual loss of dormancy, they can learn to develop creative strategies to probe resolution of many patients' conditions that otherwise seem to require (and only admit to) management.

The Roots of Chinese Medicine in Natural Philosophy

Several hundred years before *Neijing* was recorded, the *Great Commentary* (*Da Zhuang*) of *The Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*), discussed a classical Chinese epistemology or way of knowing. It presented an active thinking process that uses symbolic collections of *xiang*-images, such as the ubiquitous *yin-yang* and *wuxing* (Five Phases).[1] That text, which became central to the eduction of literate "gentlemen," presented the epistemology of Chinese natural philosophy understood through this triad:

- *Dao*-the Way ["which cannot be spoken" (*Dao De Jing*, chapter 1) or defined, but can be discerned through an active and flexible thinking process]
- *Xiang*-Image (or Symbol)
- *Qi*-Vessel [not the same character as "vital process"] refers to one's naive perception of "physical reality," which is much like the worldview from which our scientific understanding of phenomena begins. Of course, the Chinese *qi*-vessel perspective doesn't include any of the knowledge developed by modern science.

The *Da Zhuang* (*Great Commentary* [*of Yijing*]) indicated that aspirants know the nature of phenomena by using the dynamic relationships among these small groups of symbolic *xiang*-images to progress from particular knowledge of the *qi*-vessel toward the *Dao*. The Chinese quest to understand the nature of phenomena has been characterized by individual contemplation of several fundamental groups of symbols based in personal experience, rather than the profusion of discursive argumentation found in the history of western thought. While there have been many competing ideas and schools of thought during this history of Chinese medicine, they have all been based on application of the same collections of *xiang*-images. Each practitioner is invited to use *yin-yang* and the *wuxing* (Five Phases) just as they have been used by individuals throughout Chinese natural philosophy -- to point the way toward *Dao*.

What is the "subtle" nature of *Dao*, that we seek to discern through using these symbolic systems of *xiang*-images? What personal characteristics further an individual's quest for understanding

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[1] "Chinese Medicine and the *Yi Jing*'s Epistemic Methodology"

the subtle dynamics of *Dao*, and how does one cultivate that path? How do seekers of *Dao* reconcile their quest with the fundamental statement from the first chapter of *Dao De Jing*, "The *Dao* that can be spoken is not the constant *Dao*?" Even in the face of that injunction, the *Classic of Dao and its Virtue* shares directly and explicitly the nature of *Dao*, and how one knows it (chapter numbers in parenthesis).

Dao is empty (4), and that emptiness is precisely what makes it useful, like the space inside a clay pot or the doors and windows of a room (11) [and each individual's internal space, which allows *qi* to flow (*Lingshu,* 1)]. *Dao* is also the ubiquitous foundation of the manifest world (42):

> *Dao* gave birth to the One;
> The One gave birth to the Two; [the "breath" or pulsation of *yin*-*yang* pairs]
> The Two gave birth to the Three; [the dynamics of polar pairs interacting]
> And the Three gave birth to the ten thousand things. [the manifest world of *qi*-vessels]
> The ten thousand things carry *yin* on their backs and wrap their arms around *yang* [these are clearly the single most important pair of *xiang*-images/symbols]

It "can be regarded as the mother of Heaven and Earth [the Two, in the macrocosm](25)," yet *Dao* is also formless and boundless (14), and shapeless (21). While we are reminded it cannot be named (14, 37, 41), *Dao* is also compared with "the valley spirit" and "the mysterious female (6)." Inside *Dao* "there are *xiang*-images... and things (21)," [as projections of individual point of view]. The *Dao De Jing* presaged (or perhaps reprised) the epistemology delineated in the Great Commentary (*Da Zhuang*).

Certainly, whatever *Dao* is, it cannot be captured in a conceptual framework. It's outside the realm of modern (western) science, though some practitioners try stubbornly to frame ideas of Chinese medicine in the anatomical and purely physical terms of modern western medicine. The Chinese quest to understand the flux of life followed a profoundly different path than has the occidental quest to understand and subjugate nature with science and technology.

The *Dao De Jing* instructs that practitioners cultivate *Dao*, so knowing it is an experiential process, rather than a cerebral exercise of accumulating and organizing information. The character "*de*" in the title of this classic text connotes the practical and experiential "knowledge" of a craftsman. Chapter 15 is particularly direct on the nature and character of *Dao* cultivators:

> The one who was skilled at practicing *Dao* in antiquity
> Was subtle and profound, mysterious and penetratingly wise.
> His depth cannot be known.
> It is only because he cannot be known
> That therefore were I forced to describe him I'd say:
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> Hesitant was he! Like someone crossing a river in winter
> Undecided was he! As though in fear of his neighbors on all four sides. [not projecting his point of view as "right" or "true," as in modern science and frequently in everyday life]
> Solemn and polite was he! Like a guest.
> Scattered and dispersed was he! Like ice as it melts. [living in awareness and acceptance of impermanence; see also the end of this chapter]
> Genuine, unformed was he! Like uncarved wood. [an image *Zhuangzi* used prominently]

Merged, undifferentiated was he! Like muddy water.
Broad and expansive was he! Like a valley.

If you take muddy water and still it, it gradually becomes clear. [and **we** grow clear through practicing stillness or "tranquility in the center (16)"]
If you bring something [awareness] to rest in order to move it, it gradually comes alive. [by using the *xiang*-images]
The one who preserves this *Dao* does not desire to be full; [of information or prescriptive "scientific" theories as conceptual models of the world of phenomena]
Therefore, he can wear out with no need to be renewed. [certainly contrary to the "cult of longevity" following Yang Chu, who has been considered by many scholars a "Daoist"]

What self-respecting ***individual*** would align with most of those values, standards, and qualities, especially in our contemporary world of personal empowerment? Indeed, these are the values of someone who is willing (and even *yearning*) to release the limitations of his or her individual point of view, so he or she can grow to understand the subtle dynamics that create manifest appearances. Those qualities of aspirants who practice *Dao* appeal to some (*rare*) souls; the beginning of chapter 41 describes how various individual react:

When the highest type of men hear *Dao*, with diligence they're able to practice it;
When average men hear *Dao*, some things they retain and others they lose;
When the lowest type of men hear *Dao*, they laugh out loud at it.
If they did not laugh at it, it couldn't be regarded as *Dao*.

Dao De Jing also tells ***how*** such aspirants practice *Dao* -- through emptiness [releasing one's compulsive projection of point of view] and tranquility "to return to the root (16)," and that only when *Dao* is rejected by society do exceptional virtues arise [identified as virtues] (18). Finally, the text also tells us how society can pursue *Dao* (19):

Eliminate sageliness, throw away knowledge, [what we ***think*** we understand]
And the people will benefit a hundredfold.
Eliminate humanity, throw away righteousness, [as Confuscian virtues]
And the people will return to filial piety and compassion. [as natural expressions of life]
Eliminate craftiness, throw away profit,
Then we will have no robbers and thieves.

These three sayings -- regarded as a text are not complete
Thus, we must see to it that they have the following appended:

Manifest plainness and embrace the genuine;
Lessen self-interest and make few your desires;
Eliminate learning and have no undue concern.[2] [by eliminating its targets, one can quiet the "rampaging hun," which distracts many individuals from simply living in their own essential beings by comparing themselves with others]

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[2] This conclusion reprises the close of *Dao De Jing*, chapter 12:
Therefore, in the government of the Sage:
He's for the belly and not for the eyes.
Thus he rejects that and takes this.

In its typically enigmatic way, *Dao De Jing* suggests these values and standards for individuals to live in harmony with *Dao* within society, even while it also declares "the character of great virtue follows alone from *Dao* (21)." Yet, there is a difference -- great virtue is graciously accepted when it flows naturally from an individual releasing his or her personal perspective into the *Dao*, but rejected when pursued as a way of distinguishing oneself within the society. The *Dao De Jing* clear recognizes the corrosive effect of comparing oneself with others. Beware the "rampaging *Hun*," whether it places individuals above or below their experience, it wrests them from their natural virtues by comparing them with others.

Zhuangzi (circa 4th century B.C.E.) reprised many of these themes in writing about *Dao*:[3] (Chan's parentheses), [my suggested interpretations focused specifically on medicine in brackets and **bold** for emphasis]

> In the great beginning, there was non-being. It had neither being nor name. The One originates from it [that is, *Dao,* because *"Dao* gives birth to the One," *Dao De Jing* (42)]; it has oneness but not yet physical form. When things obtain it and come into existence, that is called virtue ([*de*], which gives them their individual character). That which is formless is divided (into *yin* and *yang*, [or in the case of living beings into *jing*-essence and *shen*-spirit]), and from the very beginning **going on without interruption** [like the primary channels: *Lingshu* (16)] is called destiny (*ming*). [The lineage I've learned from Jeffrey Yuen believes that each individual embodies his or her *ming*-destiny by disseminating *jing*-essence as *yuan*-source *qi* under the influence of the *sanjiao*-triple heater mechanism, especially through the back-*shu* and front-*mu* points.]
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> Through movement and rest it [*Dao*] produces all things. When things are produced in accordance with the principle (*li*) of life, there is physical form. **When the physical form embodies and preserves the spirit** so that all activities follow their own specific principles, that is nature. By cultivating one's nature one will return to virtue [*de*]. When virtue is perfect, one will be one with the beginning. Being one with the beginning, one becomes vacuous (*xu*, receptive to all) [though certainly **not** in the usual medical sense], and being vacuous, one becomes great. One will then be **united with the sound and breath of things** [things are rooted in vibrations and constant polar exchange with the environment]. When one is united with the sound and breath of things, one is then united with the universe. This unity is intimate and seems to be stupid and foolish [compare with *Dao De Jing* (41) above]. This is called profound and secret virtue, this is complete harmony [within *Dao*].

While the *conduct* of modern (western) science is based squarely on logical inferences, the history of scientific *insight* is littered with examples of discovery through a sort of reverie, as *Zhuangzi* accentuated. Scientific discovery is frequently a *creative* process, which relies on both the individual devoting considerable energy to understand a topic and focus on an unsolved challenge, and then also releasing that active process to allow the mind to "clear." That clearing of the mind through reverie leaves it available to come up with a ***new*** idea. August Kekule von Stradonitz reported discovering the ring shape of the benzene molecule after having a daydream

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[3] *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, pg. 202

of a snake seizing its own tail (a common symbol in many ancient cultures known as the Ouroboros). Einstein relied heavily on "thought experiments" that he pondered until he intuitively saw his theories of specific and general relativity.

Yet, both modern western science and historical Chinese medicine have grown through an accumulation of knowledge. Modern science periodically overthrows its conceptual model of the world, and replaces it with one that includes previous truths, but also accounts for new findings. Chinese medicine has accumulated many schools of thought. These manifold contrary doctrines coexist in Chinese medicine, where "truth" is determined individually through successful application of whatever theory (or theories) a practitioner understands best relative to each specific patient. Practitioners can always deepen their understanding of the various schools of thought by returning to the fundamental principles developed in classic texts such as *Neijing*.

The Systematic Pursuit of Chinese Natural Philosophy

More than a thousand years after *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, Song-era neo-Confuscian scholars such as Zhou Dunyi (1017-73), Shao Yong (aka Shao Kangjie, 1011-77) and later Zhu Xi (1130-1200) organized those ruminations into a method for cultivating deeper understanding.[4] This tripartite analysis provides a relatively systematic way to use the various sets of *xiang*-images discussed throughout Chinese natural philosophy to penetrate into the subtle dynamics of *Dao*:

- **number** of *xiang*-images/symbols -- each number has particular significance as an organizational framework for active thought
- **directional movement --** each *xiang*-image/symbol (within the "theory" expressed through the number of images in a particular collection) represents a directional movement
- ***li*-principle** -- recognizing that the flow of *qi* tracks along the "grains" (like the grain of wood) of one's being; these grains include both ones that were formed with the body in utero, and also various habituations which individuals develop after birth, allowing each of us to survive as individuals; they have both universal aspects that maintain individual life, and various personal ones that individuate specific approaches to fulfilling those minimal requirements.

Within Chinese thought, "the Two" certainly refers to *yin-yang*. This pair of *xiang*-images has been ubiquitous throughout Chinese history, beginning with their central role in *Yijing* (Classic of Changes) with its roots as a prehistoric oracle. The *yin-yang* pair is frequently "nested" into four: *taiyang* (*yang* within *yang*), *shaoyang* (*yin* within *yang*), *taiyin* (*yin* within *yin*), and *shaoyin* (*yang* within *yin*). This process can be repeated five more times to create the sixty-four hexagrams, and a thinking style focused on seeing deeply into the flux of nature.

We use many groups of three *xiang*-images in Chinese medicine, including the:

- Three treasures: *jing*-essence, *qi*-vital process, *shen*-spirit
- Three "levels" of an individual's *qi*: *yuan*-source, *ying*-nutritive, *wei*-defensive
- Primal position of humankind in the universe between *yang* and *yin*: heaven, human, earth

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[4] ibid, p. 460-80, 481-94, and 588-653, respectively

The last of these places humanity between the poles of *yang* and *yin* as manifest in our world. Most groups of three *xiang*-images help us identify some aspect of the dynamic responsive relationship between a *yin-yang* pair. The fundamental pair of *yin-yang* can also be merged with the a "three" to form the Six Divisions. In this case, the "Three" refers to the dynamics of the individual's interactions with the outside world (*yang* divisions) and within the interior processing one's experience (*yin* divisions). See "The Living Systems of Acupuncture Channels" for more on the Six Divisions.

While we use many groups of *xiang*-images in Chinese medicine, all larger groups can be understood as refinements of *yin-yang*, as "the ten thousand things carry *yin* on their backs and wrap their arms around *yang (Dao De Jing,* 42)." [Reference to the ten thousand things focuses on the naive perception of manifest reality as the various *qi*-vessels.] The basic rumination of *Zhuangzi*, delving into the "breath of things," leads us to focus on various polar relationships and constant polar movements in understanding the nature of things. Later neo-Confuscian thinkers of the Song era (960-1279) systematized this use of number, directional movement, and *li*-principle to differentiate the nature of various circumstances and events, and the things one meets in the manifest world.[5]

The "rules of *yin-yang* logic" (delineated below) exhibit profound differences from those of Aristotelian logic, which lay at the core of modern "scientific" worldview. The familiar rules of "common logic" describe and differentiate a world of stable objects (in time and space) with fixed qualities that can be measured. Scientific ideas rely on being "well-defined." One must be able to clearly differentiate exactly which circumstances and events represent that idea. Science seeks a "static" physical theory as a conceptual model of the world, rather than evoking a sense of flux, as in classical Chinese medicine.

Modern science seeks unifying rules that govern the nature of physical objects, which can then be combined and manipulated with the rules of common logic and projected back onto phenomena. The theories of modern science seek to define "reality," and they can be tested by tirelessly comparing the results of controlled experiments with predictions based on those theories. Controlled experiments allow us to compare the predictions based on those projections with what occurs in the world, allowing scientists to modify their theories to more closely describe physical phenomena.

When those theories are projected back onto phenomena, using the rules of common logic such as the "excluded middle" and material implication, scientists can control limited aspects of the physical world. While this modern scientific approach to the world appears to yield uniformly impressive and powerful results (as in modern electronics technology), it doesn't use the peculiar nature of life as a dynamic and responsive process, which limits its utility specifically for understanding the nature of healing and the possibilities of individual life.

On the other hand, the basic "things" and "qualities" of Chinese medicine represent directional movements. Within classical Chinese worldview, there are no fixed objects with qualities that can be measured and replicated. While individuals might be grouped according to the diagnostic

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[5] Conversation with Ed Neal, M.D., who translates *Neijing* and teaches *Neijing*-style acupuncture through the International Society for the Study of Classical Acupuncture (ISSCA), brought my focus to Song era neo-Confuscian thinkers who systemized these basic principles of Chinese natural philosophy.

categories of modern TCM that classify the manifestations of distress, they cannot be so gathered into well-defined groups by any schema of **classical** Chinese medicine (based on *Neijing*), because variables cannot be limited. Every patient exhibits individual dynamics. Our therapeutic work focuses on disentangling each patient from his or her blocks, rather than controlling their expression of distress. While controlling the expression of distress (largely measured by the intensity various clinical symptoms and signs) may be considered an "effective" goal for evidence-based medicine, it is a low form of Chinese medicine.

Our (modern) bias toward logical consistency is based on our "common logic," which is rooted in the rules of Aristotelian logic. While a well developed critical reasoning capacity based on those conceptual tools is certainly valuable, we violate the dynamic interactive nature of life when we try to force every perception and idea into its restrictive form. While the sharp knife of western logic can cut away all manner of nonsense, we begin to penetrate into the mysteries of *Dao* only when we are willing and able to "put it in its sheath." When we learn to consciously notice the restrictive projections of modern scientific thought, we can discount them. Only by suspending our socially reinforced modern knowledge of the world can we learn to practice the basic principles of classical Chinese thought, and thereby appreciate its profound understanding of the "subtle" dynamic and responsive nature of life.

While *yin-yang* begins with mutual opposition, which bears *some* resemblance to negation in common logic, that barely begins to characterize the meaning and use of those images. We have all seen long lists of pairs of things or qualities differentiated into *yang* and *yin*: day and night, sun and moon, active and receptive, etc. Such lists can juxtapose many particular ideas used in Chinese medicine: *qi* and blood, *fu*-bowels and *zang*-viscera, etc. Yet, these lists represent only a *qi*-vessel version of *yin-yang*. They are, as Jeffrey Yuen says, "only a snapshot." Such lists provide only the barest beginning for exploring the subtle dynamics of *yin-yang*, which comprise far more than the simple (and ***static***) negation of common logic.

Can we even use of the word "logic" relative to *yin-yang* thinking? While the dynamic thinking process of classical Chinese thought differs profoundly from our common (and *scientific*) logic based system, it is also based on a progression of four clear rules:

1. mutual opposition -- when then the individual's superficial layers (*couli*) are confronted by disruptive and/or stagnating influences, the natural flow of *wei qi* is aroused to **oppose** to the "pathogenic factors" to release or expel them -- pushing them out through its natural profusion; this impulse arises as the embodied spirit's reaction to influences that tend to stagnate the vital flow of *wei* (which also stagnates *ying*, as their flows depend on each other) is the origin or *taiyang* and eventually *yangming* "stages" or response. Once pathogenic factors have been internalized and the embodied spirit has responded with heat, it then responds with dampness -- a *yin* factor, which slows the virulence of heat; this impulse is the origin of *shaoyang*.
2. mutual transformation -- *jin*-fluids are produced in the stomach (from food and drink that has been intertnalized -- *ying*). The stomach uses wei qi to ascend these *jin*-fluids [in modern TCM, this function is attributed to the spleen] to the lungs, which profuses those fluids to nourish the surface. The turbid portion of these *jin*-fluids are transformed into *wei qi*, including sweat which is excreted to re-initialize *wei qi* to restore its natural profusion.

After an individual expends a lot of effort by projecting *wei qi* into the world, he or she needs rest and especially to drink water (*ying*) to nourish the depleted *wei qi*.

3. mutual consumption -- the exuberant expression of *wei qi* consumes *jin*-fluids, as in the *yangming* stage of *Shanghanlun*. The accumulation of unexpressed *jin*-fluids (behind a blockage) "degenerates" into dampness, which further blocks and consumes *wei qi*. Blockage in the exchange between *yin* and *yang* consumes both, because when the exchange occurs naturally the each nourish the other.
4. inter-dependence -- the *zheng*-upright *qi* and *xiefeng* (perverse wind), which penetrates from the exterior through the *couli*, become inter-dependent when the individual's clinical expression exhibits signs of deficiencies; one cannot strengthen the *qi* without releasing the wind, and releasing the wind relies on strengthening the *qi*; likewise, in order to tonify either *qi* or blood, we must also circulate that humor.

The progression of these four characteristics of *yin-yang* is embodied in the physiology of *ying* and *wei*, where:

- *ying* refers to the individual's choice to **internalize** various physical and experiential inputs, which "nourish" the conversion of *jing*-essence into post-natal *qi*
- *wei* refers to the natural responsiveness that intrinsically **comes out** of a living individual, which allows them to sustain life (and to heal, when it is liberated)

The "dynamic logic" of *yin-yang* is central to how individuals experience life, and consequently became central to Chinese medical understanding of physiology. *Neijing* accentuates the individual's exchange of influences with the world by using the directional movements of *ying* and *wei* as the main conceptual framework for post-natal *qi*.

Yet, we need not complicate the picture by adding new terms; instead we can simply realize that each of the familiar humors of modern Chinese medicine includes an implied direction:

- *Qi* conveys the individual's ability to act. It allows the individual to express outward impulses that emerge from within (*yang*).
- Blood contains imprinted emotions, so it conveys the individual's capacity to experience. The quality and flow of blood depend especially on what the individual chooses to internalize from the world and how they are processed internally (*yin*).

Qi and blood are more than *physical* humors; they describe the constant directional exchange with the environment that allows individuals to survive. The characteristic movements of the Six Divisions through the legs and arms create the twelve primary channels. Finally the *luo* and *jingbie* (channel divergences) are created and filled in response to the needs of post-natal life. Sometimes people just need to put aside some unresolved issue, so they can continue living.

Might the experiential nature of pursuing *Dao* suggest a strict and literal interpretation for chapter 16 of *Dao De Jing*? The beginning of that chapter instructs seekers of *Dao* to:

Take emptiness to the limit;
Maintain tranquility in the center.
The ten thousand things -- side-by-side they arise;
And by this I see their return [to their source in *Dao*]
Things come forth in great numbers;
Each one returns to its root
This is called tranquility

Practitioners can find their way "back toward *Dao*" through contemplative and creative use of the basic *xiang*-images of Chinese medicine. We can discern the dynamic flux of the breath (or pulsation) of *yin-yang* as *xiang*-images (symbols), rather than through accumulating information about classifying the ten thousand things -- in this case the manifold clinical manifestations we encounter in individual patients. While the *Dao* cannot be spoken, it can be discerned *beyond language* in a fluid dynamic "state of mind," as *Zhuangzi* clearly suggested.

Of course, this "state" isn't static. It remains fluid and dynamic, in part by being receptive to what comes into the individual's awareness and creatively using various *xiang*-images, rather than projecting the individual's compulsive attachment to core interpretations onto all perceptions and experiences. Those who practice *Dao* focus on constantly recognizing those four qualities of *yin-yang*, learning to discern the dynamic responsiveness of each individual's quest to maintain life, in part by accommodating unresolved blockages.

Using *Xiang*-Images to Discern the Dynamics of Life

We use many groups of *xiang*-images in Chinese medicine, including the very common Five Phases (*wuxing*). Claude Larre noted "one can say that the five elements [phases] are the division of the vital movement, its breaking down into five 'moments,' just as *yin yang* is its bipolar representation."[6] Each of these *xiang*-images represents a directional movement:

- Wood -- ascends and pushes outward
- Fire -- spreads through one's experience
- Earth -- consolidates (turns inward, embodies)
- Metal -- descends
- Water -- stores potential; polarizes the individual, as separate from (and interacting with) the environment

Each individual exhibits a *li*-principle of embodiment, which regulates how his or her *jing*-essence disseminates to contain and preserve his or her *shen*-spirit. We use the Five Phases to differentiate each individual's peculiar propensities in distributing *jing*-essence, which follows both the individual and universal *li*-principles of embodiment to track (or "engrain") those fundamental movements of life in each person, specifically. Thus, we even use the shorthand of someone being a "wood person," etc.

Perhaps the greatest mistake introduced into Chinese medicine in bringing it to the modern west was a simple translation error -- rendering *wuxing* as "Five Elements." The character "*xing*" contains the pictogram of men marching, signifying an automatic or non-volitional movement. While many writers have shifted to the much more accurate "Five Phases," the damage has been done. The original translation subtly framed Chinese medicine in the "logic" of western thought, which is a world consisting of objects with fixed measurable qualities. In turn, that inaccuracy led to an equally inaccurate understanding of "excess and deficient," "full and empty," and many similar "metrics" used in making differentiations within Chinese medicine, which should be understood as processes rather than states of being.

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[6] *The Way of Heaven*, pg. 21

Chinese medicine is based on the principles of Chinese natural philosophy, especially the process of knowing discussed in classic texts and important early commentaries like the *Da Zhuang* (*Great Commentary* [*of Yijing*]). We simply use those principles to examine and understand the object of our focus -- individual life in health and disease. We are not particularly interested in the *qi*-vessel of the physical body, but how it lives as a dynamic responsive individual. We focus on using key systems of *xiang*-images rooted in "the Two" (i.e. *yin-yang*), as *jing*-essence contains *shen*-spirits and the *shen*-spirits animate the *jing*-essence (which represents the individual's physicality). There are two primary "types" or "levels" of animation:

1. The Five Phases exhibit how the (undifferentiated and) animated *jing*-essence conveys itself outward to support post-natal life, forming into the **five *zang*-viscera**, which specifically contain the *shen*-spirits (*hun*, *shen*, *yi*, *po*, *zhi*) and supporting the five central functions of sustaining individual life through dissemination of *jing*-essence to:
    - animate the *zangfu* and channels -- Wood
    - open the senses to receive sense data, allowing the individual's awareness to spread through his or her experience -- Fire
    - consolidate the individual's embodiment by descending the *gu*-valley (establishing the downward movement of peristalsis) -- Earth
    - grasp the *qi* of Heaven (lung *qi*), by descending it to connect with *jing*-essence -- Metal
    - polarize *yuan*-source *qi* outward as an individual (including the capacity to depolarize), maintain an internal environment, in part by eliminating waste -- Water
2. The Six Divisions are the canonical movements of (post-natal) life based on the individual's constant interactions with the world (see "The Living Systems of Acupuncture Channels"). Individuals internalize experiences through both the sense organs and directly through the body (including, but not limited to, one's sense of touch) -- the channels, which are expressions of the six divisions through the legs and arms; these inputs are experientially processed through the *fu*-bowels, serving their associated *zang*-viscera because the *shen*-spirits don't interact directly with the world. Individuals also internalize food and drink through the mouth, where it descends into the stomach and are physically processed by the **six *fu*-bowels**. These six *fu*-bowels conduct the embodied spirit's interactions with material that has been internalized, including eliminating waste to maintain the quality of the individual's internal environment**.**

Each individual is the unique product of combining the **Five Phases** pulsating between *jing*-essence and post-natal *qi*, and all of his or her vital interactions with the world, characterized by the **Six Divisions**. Both of those collections of *xiang*-images differentiate bi-polar movements that combine to describe "the breath of *qi*." These two "levels" of pulsation interact with each other in myriad ways, as individuals maintain and create their lives. While *jing*-essence lay beyond the realm of the primary channels, the channel distinctions/divergences (*jingbie*) and *luo* communicate between the Five and the Six, and therein lay a measure of their profound import.

Although the Five Phases have been widely discussed by contemporary teachers of Chinese medicine in the West, those traditions focus only on how *jing*-essence is distributed in each individual. The traditions that have grown from teachings of Larre & Rochat and J.R. Worseley note that each individual distributes *jing*-essence as both *yuan*-source *qi* and *jing*-essential *qi*

through the Five Phases (the former to the channels and *zangfu* to activate vital life process and the latter to the *zang*-viscera so the individual can experience emotions), but they fail to discuss that outward movement of *jing*-essence as part of a polar "breathing" relationship between the individual's central core of *jing*-essence and his or her post-natal *qi*.

The other direction of that polar exchange allows individuals to absorb experiences from life back into otheir *jing*-essence. This includes both the "healthy" evolution of *jing*-essence through absorbing the variety of life's many experiences, and integrating them into their essential beings. This movement inward also allows individuals to absorb the pathogenic stagnations that have been generated throughout life, and storing them in "dormancy." The embodied spirit does this by embedding these unresolved pathogenic factors into dense (*yin*) physical humors, which are ultimately supported by *jing*-essence.

The Six Divisions exhibit the centrally important polar "breathing" (polar exchange) relationship between individuals and their environments. Their key role in the channel systems makes them even more important than the Five Phases. Practitioners can use them to learn to understand the dynamics of individual life, and specifically to design treatment strategies that directly facilitate the individual's intrinsic healing process. While the Five Phases differentiate the individual's distribution of *jing*-essence, the Six Divisions differentiate the vital movements of post-natal *qi*, and liberating those movements to express themselves naturally stimulates an individual's healing process.

The fundamental movements of life described by the Six Divisions are expressed directly through the *jingjin* (channel sinews), which conduct the responsiveness of *wei qi*. While the *jingjin* are nourished later in life by *jin*-fluids, throughout life their patency in sustaining vital movements draws some *jing*-essence outward through the *jingbie* (channel distinctions). At birth, the individual swallows "the mudpill," which connects the movement of *wei qi* in the external *jingjin* with the vital movements of the internal *jingjin*, such as peristalsis. Initiating that movement, which remains vital throughout life, signifies that the individual is now responsible for generating his or her own "post-natal" *qi* (*qi* and blood) through internalizing and digesting "turbid" influences. Habituating this process eventually creates the primary channels, which then regulate the vital movements of the Six Divisions throughout life.

Introducing turbid influences into the individual, which must be digested into post-natal qi, creates a constant source of stagnation, as individual grasp at and project their individual points of view. Those stagnating influences would block the primary channels, if they did not have access to the rest of the channel complexes, which absorb those stagnations so the primary channels can maintain the characteristic directional movements of the Six Divisions. Those systems of channel complexes sustain the continuous flow of post-natal *qi*, even in the face of the individual's manifold challenges, disappointments, and irritations.

The modern bias toward differentiating the vital movements of life with the Five Phases. The *Dao De Jing* (12) warns us about focusing our attention on the targets of the Five Phases, which regulate the dissemination of *yuan*-source *qi*. It reminds us that individuals are apt to exhaust the foundations of their beings (*jing*-essence) through coping with stagnations that had originally arisen from distributing their *jing*-essence via the Five Phases. Those stagnations develop because individuals grasp at the phenomena they meet in life, and their interpretations of them. Eventually, those stagnations block the vital flow of post-natal *qi*:

The five colors cause one's eyes to go blind.
Racing horses and hunting cause one's mind to go mad.
Goods that are hard to obtain pose an obstacle to one's travels
The five flavors confuse one's palate.
The five tones cause one's ears to go deaf.

Contemporary Chinese medical theory represents only a small portion of the rich material discussed in *Neijing*. Modern TCM is *zangfu*-centric. While the *zangfu* are defined through their respective *xiang*-images rather than materially as in western medicine, clinical theory aimed at regulating the physical humors (*qi*, blood, and fluids) they regulate remains substantially more *qi*-vessel oriented than the classical theory of the channel complexes.

At its best Chinese medicine is a thinking process, rather than a body of doctrine. It is definitely **not** a medicine of systematic correspondence. The most obvious and simple reason is that there is not a single system of "correspondences." Can we doubt that the Six Divisions are equally as important as the better known Five Phases? More profoundly, classifying the manifestations of distress only addresses the qi-vessel level of perceiving life. Instead, we aspire to focus on disentangling the complex of pathogenic factors and adaptations exhibited by each individual.

Practitioners cannot learn to discern the subtle dynamics of *Dao* through "book learning" alone, accumulating and organizing information. Their knowledge of those dynamics within the microcosm of individual life comes from Chinese medical practice. Each individual "patient's" life process is a laboratory of *Dao*, and Chinese medicine is an *applied* natural philosophy. Our therapeutic interactions provide a constant stream of feedback, allowing practitioners who seek to sort out the "subtle" dynamics of *Dao* within their patients to refine their perception and discrimination.

The classic texts' many conundrums put many people off by confusing and undermining their attempts to grasp their theory as a coherent conceptual model; they also draw some practitioners continually back to consider their penetrating wisdom. Studying *Neijing* includes an element of archeology, both to penetrate into the text's many conundrums and to understand the subtle dynamics of each individual patient. The same cognitive skills one develops in studying the text are directly applied to differentiate a patient's individual challenges surviving in the world, and develop a treatment strategy that support those efforts.

We all have so much unresolved stagnation to uncover, reprocess, and find ways to resolve. I've found that process generally involves some manner of releasing, often of some "core" personal interpretations. Each of us holds onto these compulsively, and then projects them into everyday experience, where they become the foundation of current experience. While an individual's "construction of reality" has been somewhat described academically (intellectually), most people remain "naive" and unconscious of this process. It remains nearly universal in contemporary society, until a specific individual makes *some* progress in exploring these dynamics at the center of his or her individual life, and focuses on learning to discount the influence of core projections.

Early in the first chapter of *Lingshu*, the text openly declares itself filled with subtle knowledge hidden within conundrums, which only superior physicians understand are vitally important [my comments in brackets]:

> *The ordinary physician guards the gates* [manages the ***manifestations*** of distress]; *the superior physician controls the moving power* [the "subtle" dynamics that create manifest reality]. *The moving power is inseparable from its space. The moving power, at the center of this space, is clear, quiet, and subtle. Its coming cannot be hurried; its going cannot be chased.*[7] [Treatments don't ***cause*** healing; they can only stimulate the moving power of *qi* to resume its quiet clear expression, which we know as health. Trying to control the expression of distress in symptoms and signs forsakes to potential for profound healing that are available through liberating the moving power of *qi*.]

During the two millennia since the initial recording of *Suwen* (*Simple Questions*) and *Lingshu* (*Spiritual Pivot*), some portion of acupuncturists have studied and practiced Chinese medicine as an applied natural philosophy of health. While the text offers many ideas and descriptions explicitly, many others are shrouded in mystery. Those texts use many methods to *show* various ideas, rather than explaining them explicitly, so the process of sorting out their wisdom is far more hermeneutics than modern style scholarship. As in the rest of Chinese natural philosophy, specific numbers of *xiang*-images characterize various aspects of phenomena; the text uses various symbols and "codes" to hide its teachings in plain sight, including the sequence information is presented being part of the teachings. Interpreting and understanding many key ideas of classical Chinese medicine relies on a combination of the text and various fundamental philosophical considerations about life.

Conclusion: Transcending Ordinary Perception to Find Transformational Healing

The channel "complexes" exist to support the primary channels in maintaining vital flow of post-natal *qi*, as differentiated by the six divisions of *yin-yang*. The sinews stimulate flow directly in the primary channels through the individual's physical movement, though their freedom of movement is generally limited by the channel distinctions/divergences (*jingbie*). Those limitations are the cost of being able to automatically respond to circumstances through how we've learned to be and act in the world. They and the *luo* vessels also allow each individual to store the unresolved byproducts of their attachment to his or her perspectives and desired outcomes.

Many patients who ***appear*** deficient are truly maintaining excesses, which result from their suspending and storing unresolved pathogenic factors; that process taxes *zheng*-upright *qi*, so these patients appear deficient. Suspending pathogenic factors deflects *yin* humors, such as *jin* and *ye*-fluids, *xue*-blood, even *jing*-essence, and it either taxes or depolarizes *wei qi* to maintain dormancy. Both the initial process of embedding unresolved pathogenic factors into physical humors, and their ongoing storage in relative dormancy, costs the individual *zheng*-upright *qi*.

These accumulation of unresolved pathogenic factors gradually progresses, which compels the embodied spirit to continue devoting a certain amount of its resources to ongoing maintenance. The accumulation also gradually fills the space in which qi flows freely, and thereby restricts the individual's ability to move physically, while it maintains vital movement in the present. According to this analysis, osteo-arthritis of peripheral joints results from the embodied spirit's

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[7] *Lingshu or The Spiritual Pivot*, pg. 1

successful displacement of stagnations through the channel divergences (*jingbie*) away from the *zangfu* to the external anatomy.

While osteo-arthritis drives many people to seek therapy, it arises when the embodied spirit has found a functional way of compartmentalize its unresolved pathogenic factors. Clinical signs of this condition begin to emerge when the individual's capacity to suspend those pathogenic factors begins to overflow, and they also slow the person's ability to interact with the world. The symptoms serve the embodied spirit, by forcing the patient to slow his or her interactions, and thus presumably generate fewer unresolved interactions.

Most people with degenerative and progressive conditions exhibit such excesses. Even when their clinical presentation seems to indicate deficiency, it is only an *apparent* deficiency based in the need to "pay the storage tax." The key to reversing such diseases is to determine the nature of the individual's suspended and stored excesses, and discern how to stimulate each embodied spirit to release or otherwise resolve them. Clearly, classical Chinese medicine is not "neat and tidy." It is not a clear and systematic list of diagnostic differentiations and treatment criteria. "The *Dao* that can be spoken [clearly defined] is not the constant *Dao*." (*DDJ*, 1)

Classical Chinese medicine challenges us to cultivate our perception. Seeing the *Dao* -- the subtle dynamics of physiology, in contrast to the *qi*-vessel manifestation (symptom-sign complex), requires one who is "subtle and profound, mysterious and penetratingly wise. His depth cannot be known." (*DDJ*, 15). This process requires that practitioners "sort out" symptoms to differentiate pathogenic factors from the embodied spirit's intrinsic response to them, rather than simply classifying them as the overt expressions of distress. When we clearly focus on resolving pathogenic factors we can stimulate the embodied spirit's intrinsic capacity to heal, rather than managing symptomatic expression.

If a person's pathology accumulates, there are rarely "random" symptoms; they all occur in a progression. The sequence of each patient's history is often vitally important for our developing a clear understanding a that patient's individual dynamics. We are challenged to discern which basic progression each patient exhibits, and their individual ways of exhibiting the progress of accumulation in their lives. We want to evaluate how far each patient has progressed, recognizing that individuals frequently "skip" stages in the basic progression for various specific reasons of their beings. While the underlying theory is very important to help us understand the process of an individual's pathology, we still have to find where each patient's embodied spirit is currently struggling most and facilitate what it's trying to do.

Each treatment strategy is a gesture to stimulate flow in a particular way; we need to clearly identify the nature and location of blockage, and guard against being distracted by the manifest accumulation behind it. While each symptom is a finger pointing at the nature and location of the underlying block, that process still challenges us to clearly "sort them out." We always seek to address the **block**, which is the key to "unlocking" the healing process, rather than trying to manage the embodied spirit's reaction(s) to it. This understanding of treatment influences how a practitioner can formulate both acupuncture and herbal strategies, and introduces a focus for developing strategies with other modalities, bringing them into the realm of Chinese medicine.

This approach to Chinese medicine shifts the focus of acupuncture from points with "functions" and "indications" to considerations of how each channel system contributes to maintaining the vital flow of *qi*. Herbal medicine shifts away from treating by diagnostic "patterns" (and

especially away from pharmacognosy, which is the analysis of herbs according to modern scientific criteria) toward formulating based on the movements that each herb stimulates within the embodied spirit. The study of Chinese herbal medicine is based on the flavors, temperatures, and channel resonances of the herbs, because each of these represents a directional movement. Regardless of modality, our therapeutic focus centers on stimulating and facilitating the individual to resolve his or her blocks, trusting the embodied spirit's intrinsic capacity to heal, rather than managing the expression of distress.

Diagnosing and developing treatment strategies based on blocks, rather than the more familiar clinical manifestations of distress that have often accumulated around those blocks, challenges practitioners to "sort out" their individual patient's symptoms and signs. We seek to understand the dynamic process of both the ongoing accumulation of stagnating influences, and the individual's evolving strategies to accommodate those unresolved pathogenic factors. Perhaps the most pointed instruction given in *Dao De Jing* for the practice of medicine is "'Reversal' is the movement of *Dao* (*DDJ ,* 40)."

On the other hand, modern TCM teaches practitioners to classify the manifestations of distress into symptom-sign complexes. If we don't grow beyond that static way of understanding diagnosis, we will largely be condemned to managing the expression of distress, rather than finding ways to stimulate profound healing. We may be able to help our patients restore dormancy and thus *apparent* health, but the modern clinical doctrine doesn't explicitly teach practitioners to differentiate an individual's key block and stimulate healing transformations. Yet, some talented practitioners find ways to do it anyway.

Disease reversion isn't a fantasy; it isn't *Daoist* magic, though it frequently seems that way to both patients (and even sometimes to experienced practitioners). Transformational healing is the birthright of every individual. Where there's life, there's hope… and a chance. However, the quest to find an effective healing strategy often depends on both incisive discrimination by practitioners, and considerable willingness among their "patients." Although profound healing arises naturally when an individual can successfully release accumulated blocks to allow the embodied spirit to express itself, each individual has entangled reasons those pathogenic factors have not been previously resolved, and those challenges seek final resolution. Healing completes.

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