

The energetics of life: An introduction to yinyang / 5-phases

In pre-history there was innate knowing that everything was One. Before humans could think their way into the box of “self” there was an acceptance of everything as it was. At this time one could say that there was no such thing as dis-ease and that the human was the human-animal, not the human-modernist added-on to the human-animal as it is today. There may have been pain and illness in this state but no suffering that then turned the situation into dis-ease. Dis-ease is a situation of the struggle of the modern human with him/her “self”. The most ancient cultural civilizations still retained a touch of the original animal instinctual sense that have connection to practices which still exist in the world today.

From the Vedas of India and the origin of Hinduism, to the Taoism of China, and the Pythagoreans of Greece, there was an understanding of profound unity and the prehistoric connection somewhat remained, the realization that the world was not made up of dualistic ideas but was unified, subject and object only seemed separate, but this was only due to the human misperception. In all indigenous cultures there is a pantheistic type ideology of spirit being the manifestor of all things, or that “god” is not something separate but is everything from no-thing. This is the same expression just put in a different way. Pantheism, monism, Non-duality and everything which expresses a similar connotation are all pointing at exactly the same thing, Oneness.

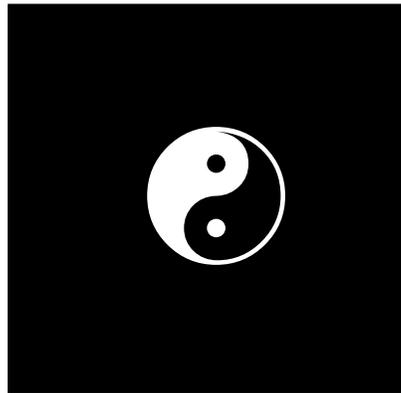
It is therefore unsurprising that most methods of expressing this are similar to each other, perhaps using different terminology in different parts of the world or different languages, but humans are humans and the basic principles of what they see and understand are exactly the same, so the origin of all human understanding is One understanding.

My main study has been of the ancient Chinese perspective so this is what I will present to you, while emphasizing that in representing one expression we are representing all. When it comes to exploring energetics the Chinese are innovative and deeply clear in their explanations, Taoism being the root cultural tie to the prehistoric and to the absolute reality of the moment. Taoist expression is profoundly simple and without any notion of belief system or requirement to hold onto a theoretical opinion. I was moved to “study” or what I found was to be “un-learnt” through this, because to me it is as close as is possible to the root meaning within all cultural ideology, stripped to its bare bones without confusion. The Taoist expression is less possible to be misconstrued than many other cultural expressions of the same thing. It is a “pure-science” that is in realization of what might be called a “quantum” reality in modern physics and for thousands of years it has been expressing just this, in a way which is presently beyond the imaginings of the theoretical dualism of modern physics, and therefore able to see things from a less specific, more accurate field of view.

Specific does not mean accurate. Energetics is really the realization that to be “accurate” or to understand accuracy-of-view of a situation or to explain a phenomenon, the view needs to be broad enough to see subject and object yet also to realize what underpins both. When this is understood then there is clarity.

In Chinese philosophy there are 2 forms or interpretive structures that are real the key ways to discuss and understand cognitively all natural phenomena. Some people call these expressions “theoretical models” but that actually sells them short, as they are expressions of simply the way nature is, they way it moves, it is more a map than a theory, more a pointer or direction towards our instinctual sense rather than something purely cognitive.

The first expression of understanding reality through thought is called yinyang. Yinyang is written as one word because it is One, not two, although many people will miss this point. The symbol expresses this:-



The background black is emphasizing the Oneness. The foreground is the white aspect of the yinyang symbol and this aspect is the yang. The white is on top of the back here. The back within the symbol is called yin, the back outside the symbol is called Tao. Tao means that which is primordial and unifying to both yin and yang, it underpins both of them and is easier to understand cognitively as being more like the yin and underpinning of the yang.

So if we just look at yinyang to begin with.

Yin	Yang
Earth (also connected to Void)	Heaven/ Sky
Autumn and winter	Spring, summer
Sour and bitter flavours	Pungent, sweet, and salty flavours
Female (archetype—earth and fire)	Male (archetype—sky and water)
Soft (but dense)	Hard (but energetic)
Slow to change	Fast to change
Dense	Diffused
Calm / stillness	Change
Silence	Sound
Dark	Light
Accumulating	Expanding
Deep	Superficial

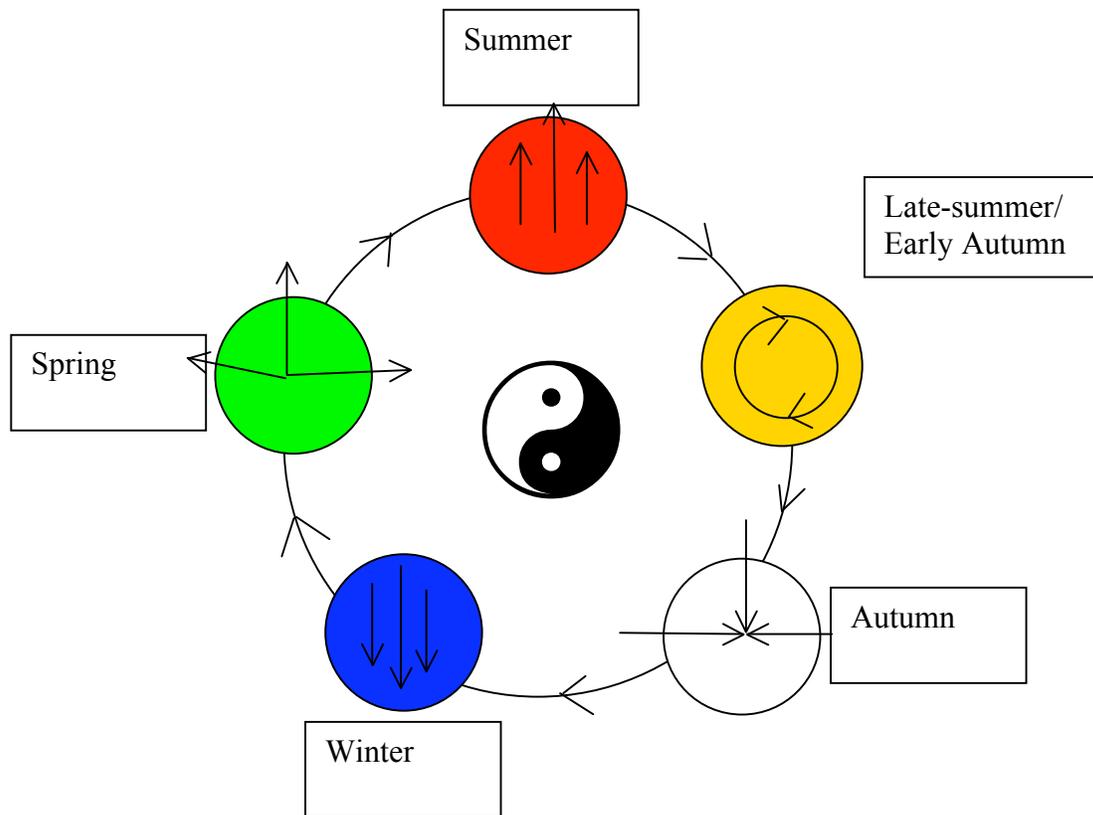
Inside	Outside
Cold	Heat
Receptive	Penetrating
Below	Above
Absorbing in	Radiating / giving off
Physical	Energetic
Body	Spirit

These offer some immediate ways with which we can see the different qualities of yinyang. Essentially yin and yang are poles of each other's expression, it is one thing with two poles, like a magnet. The magnet is One thing yet it has two poles and this represents exactly the nature of yinyang. One aspect is more accumulative and cooler, the other is hotter and more vibrant. All phenomena can be explained by simply using yinyang to describe something. We always have to explain yinyang as describing something relatively. So for example the burning charcoal is relatively more yang than ice. The top of the tree is relatively more yang than its roots. The roots are relatively more yin than the leaves and so it goes on. Yang is the expanded, the bright the open, it relates to the male only as a stereotype of expansive heat. The yin is associated with the female only as the stereotype of accumulative energy and calm, cool sense and inner density. The point is that these expressions are non-absolute but they form a feel of reality as heat and cold, as sensory perceptions. This descriptive process can be applied to anything and it is the fundamental way to understand anything within the functions of Chinese philosophy, including its medicine. Please remember that yinyang is only a tool of thought, it is not in and of itself reality, for reality does not require tools to investigate it, it simply is as it is. Hence yinyang is in the realm of thought and as such is abstract. However, it is abstract in such a way that it requires a person to use their senses to investigate, it is not in and of itself objective truth in a box, but a fundamental part of human ways of thinking and seeing, without judgment, the nature of the sea of energy (or Qi/ Chi/ Ki) that is all of life.

Yinyang constantly are in the process of change into one another, just as death and life are a continuum and the seasons express this within a year, a day, an hour or a minute, cycles within cycles. This is the nature of what is represented by yinyang.

From yinyang what we can do is split up the definition into 5 parts. This we call the 5-phases of change simply showing 5 aspects of yinyang. Unfortunately even at the so-called "highest level" of explanation people seldom understand that yinyang and 5-phases are exactly the same expression. There is an immediate requirement in circles of medicine, and the process of trying to get to grips with Chinese philosophy in western ways of thinking, that it's all a bag of bits mis-conjoined and an attempt to find "different ways" to explain something borne out of societal requirements. This is never so with the root of Chinese understanding, only with its branches. At root it is always about concentric circles. Whether we see things in a way that splits Oneness into two dimensions or five dimensions or ten thousand dimensions it makes no difference, it is still the same Oneness. Hence 5 splits of the yinyang is simply 5 aspects of expression

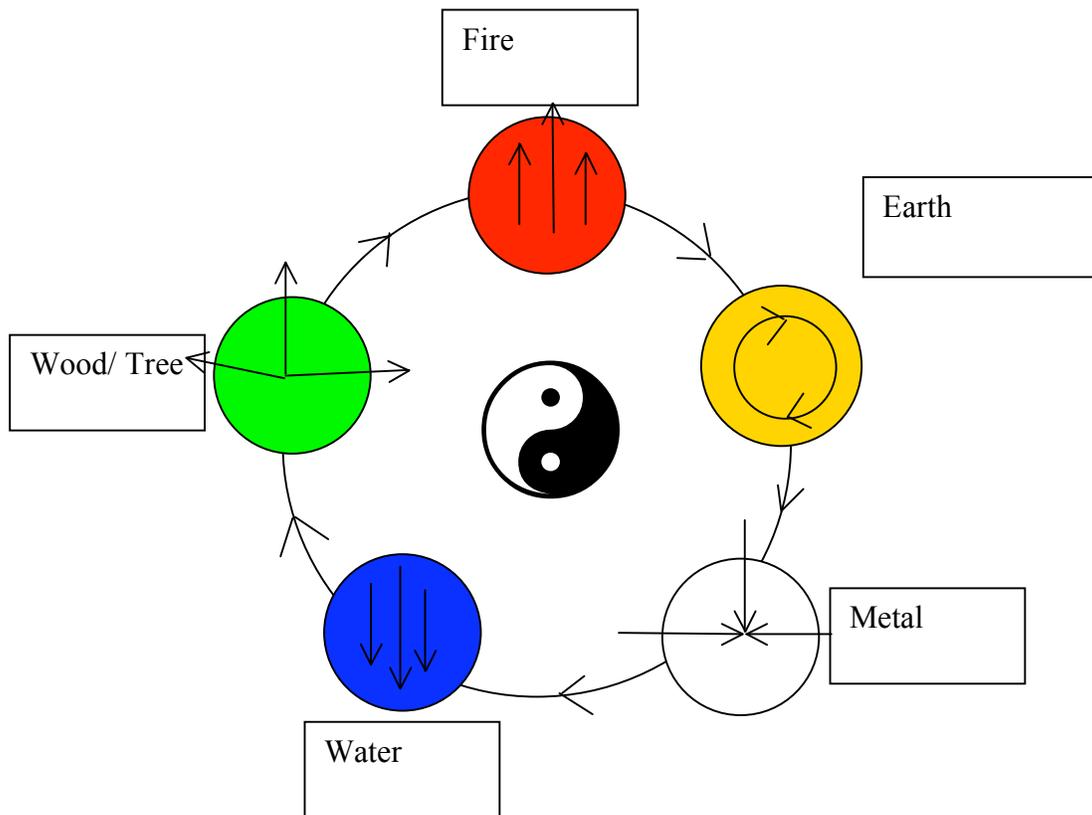
which makes for a more complex-looking picture. Let's look first at the 5 phase expression:-



This cycle of seasonal changes might not seem correct, because we usually consider 4 seasonal changes. If we were looking at things through the 4 angles of view then we might quarter up the yinyang symbol, but as it is the 5-phases is fifths of expression. Why 5? In all ancient cultures 5 was very much associated with the nature of the human being and their expression. Whereas the processes of earth and the 4 seasons and the direction of the earth's surface were always even numbers like 4, 8 and 12 associated, 5 was always reserved for the 5-senses, 5 external appendages i.e .the head and the 4 limbs expression of the human form, with 4 fingers + thumb per hand 5 toes on each foot. 5 is very much a human expression.

So the 5-phases expression is something the Chinese found deeply useful for rendering most phenomena *into human terms*, how things related to the human in his/ her "5-dimensional" perspective of reality. This became useful on many levels, particularly in medicine where herbs and ingredients of medicines were able to be understood in relation to the human body, the human body itself could be associated with aspects of the 5 phases, again just as with yinyang all relative to each other. This of course made for a much more complex expression of correspondence. There are now 5 spinning plates to think about rather than 2, so it's complex. However, not too complex for the human mind

so as to separate it from the accuracy of the senses. These 5 phases were described as different expressions of nature:-



The arrows on the diagram in each phase show the nature of the energy of each expression. Wood, or more accurately the growing nature of the alive tree, grows upwards and outwards, it is expansion and associated with spring and the organ of the liver in the human body. Fire is the peak of summer expansion, it is full to bursting and relates to the heart within the human body. The Earth quality is associated with the situation just after summer or just after mid-day where the humidity is higher as there is a beginning of condensation of water from the dryness of mid-day. It is a point of balance between the coolness of the evening and the heat of the day and is associated with the digestive system in the human body. The metal phase is a situation of cooling and calming into the evening it is a process of accumulation of water and a drawing inwards, like a spring naturally draws in the water of the day or in autumn the sap is dropped down into the roots of the tree It relates to the lung organ in the human body. The water phase is the mid-winter or midnight, the coldest time where everything is drawn downwards and inwards and accumulates deep within the body, it is calm and internal and is the potential energy store for the day to come or for the spring ice to crack from deep winter. It is associated with the kidney, more specifically the left kidney within the human body.

The point is that everything is interrelated and joined, the seasons are within the human body as well as in the external environment and the human now has an understanding of

him/her “self” within the Oneness of this in a cognitive and sensory way, as all these expressions are verified not by a mental concept but by empirical sensory understanding that is beyond the cognitive.

From these 5 expressions we can form a chart which allows us to see the 5- ways of looking at the body energy.

[Please note, those of you involved in Chinese medicine may take issue with the expiations of organ association with phase and also with flavour with phase. This unfortunately is something that requires much more in-depth discussion, which can be found in my soon to be published book “The nature of Classical Oriental medicine” wherein the reasoning for the application is explained fully. This is as close to the original meaning and ancient way the 5-phases may have been understood and underpins the modern explanations that have disregarded the unifying principle of medicine. I urge you to study this area carefully and involve your own senses in the investigation, please also note the assignment of flavours which will also be held in contention by some]:-

	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Vital organ	Liver	Heart (+ Right kidney)	Pancreas (spleen)	Lung	Left-Kidney
Secondary organs	Large Intestine	Bladder and Small Intestine and Circulatory systems (Triple Warmer)	Stomach	Gallbladder	-
Season	Spring	Summer	Late- Summer	Autumn	Winter
Seasonal Flavours	Pungent/ Spice	Salty	Sweet	Sour	Bitter
Medicinal flavour for each season	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty

One of the key factors that makes the 5-phases easier to understand is the 5 flavours which, although they are exactly the same as all the other attributions, are also a vitally important way of re-connecting with the senses.

Pungency/Wood energy:

The pungency is that which expands and pushes outwards, just like the nature of spring and also the function of the liver when in movement, the liver distributing and expanding its store of blood outwards towards the limbs in activity. It is an expression of the beginning of yang, the expansion of pungency and spice activates this in the body and

brings about more movement of the energy inside-outwards. This is why it is also associated with the large intestine organ which passes out energy with the out-breath.

Salty/ Fire energy:-

The fire energy is the peak of summer, it is the hottest of the flavours in that it “lowers the boiling point of the body fluids” and makes for an upwards effect and a stronger heart contraction, which is why this is avoided in all heart conditions. It reduces fluids in the body and sends them outwards like summer sweat where the salt can be tasted on the skin as it is leached out of the body for it to cool off.

Sweet/ Earth energy:-

Sweetness is the main flavour associated with all types of food all food has a form of sweetness involved in its flavour or it would not be food. Sweet is what the digestive systems needs to draw out of food in order to gain the energy to function. Relative to the other flavours it is a mid-point between the coolness of the autumn and the heat of summer and so as a flavour this means that it contains both heating or energy and cooling fluids. So you get a kind of warm dampness which is the condensation found in the digestive system. Too much damp and it gets too cool, too hot and it gets too dry, so the inner environment of sweetness is the balance point of these conditions.

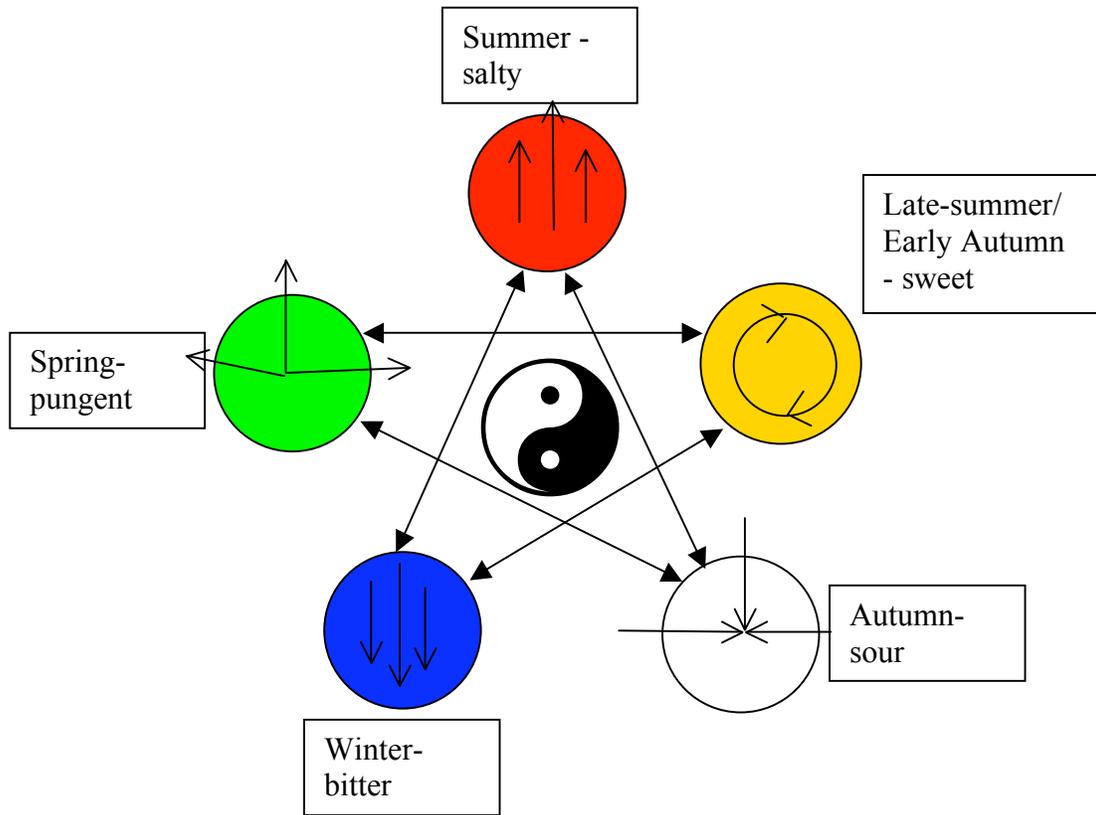
Sour/ Metal energy:-

The Lung out-breath is very much the associated expression for autumn, which is the sighing and letting go of the days of summer and a moving into the calm coolness of autumn. As the leaves drop off the trees the energy is stored within and this is the expression of the sour flavour. As with the taste of lemon which makes the mouth dry and contracted, so with autumn all the fluids are drawn inwards and the sourness is literally this accumulation process, like a sponge drawing in fluid. The sour flavour activates this within the body and allows us to hold onto fluids and accumulate more.

Bitter/ Winter energy:-

The bitterness is coldness. It is a deep still calm within the body that is deep low down into the Left-kidney and into the bones of the body. It is that which is hardening and deeply accumulating in the body. Contraction is not the right word as this implies a kind of intended active movement inwards. Accumulation is simply this accumulation due to lack of heat, and bitterness is representative of total lack of heat and total darkness and inwardness. This is to do with water storage, an inward holding of energy.

Notice that the flavours are both actual tastes from foods/ herbs, but also the flavours are an expression of the energy of the 5-phases, so “flavour” or “phase” or “season” are interchangeable labels. The medicinal flavours for each season are opposite. This is what is commonly misunderstood by modern ideology applied to Classical medicine. In the summer season of saltiness, bitterness will cool things down, in spring sourness will calm the nature of the pungent season. In autumn the opposite is true, pungency warms and moves the coldness of winter and in winter saltiness warms things right up. The nature of the medicine is always to balance out the nature of the seasons. The effect is as follows:-



This is how medicine can be cognitively understood within Chinese medicine. Of course this doesn't just apply to herbal flavour or even the flavour of foods but in fact to the flavour of life itself. All things are totally the same, colours, flavours, everything. Everything has a unique quality but the nature of the flavours is that they are an energy that we can taste, We use this quality as a description in interpersonal relationships: a "bitter person" we might find quite cold to be around, a "sweetie" might be quite warm or nurturing. Of course this doesn't always apply but it is interesting that in our own language we may use these means of expressing the flavours in energetic terms without even realising it.

This is the nature of the maps of energy of the ancients, they are no more or less than a cognitive tool but always one that does not deflect into the abstract but focuses directly on experiential senses, drawing the thinker back to his/her body. In fact it becomes a map back to our instincts, a means of feeling that life is not split into 2 or 5 or anything else but is a spectrum of colour that is expressing all at once, a play of light and sound. In the end medicine isn't possible unless it is a spontaneous expression coming from a place

beyond the abstract-cognitive. Healing is the realization of Oneness, pure and simple, these models above might simply be pointers or triggers to the realization that in every way the universe is “I” and “I am” the universe and that this cannot be displaced by the so-called “separate self”.

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