

East Meets West

By Richard Esquivel, L.Ac., MTCM

This is the fourth in a series of articles designed to educate the public on Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Yin and yang are the way of sky and earth, are fundamental to all things, are the parents of change and transformation, the origin and beginning of birth and destruction, the palace of gods, and are necessarily considered in understanding the basis of treating disease.

-Yellow Emperor, Nei Jing Su Wen 5 (Great Treatise on the Proper Representation of Yin and Yang)

Yin and Yang

In ancient China the world was viewed as the interplay of opposites. These opposite qualities, called yin and yang, can apply to materials, processes, reactions, or behaviors. Just as the world can be divided into yin and yang attributes, these classifications can be further subdivided into yin and yang. Grammatically, yin and yang are mostly used as adjectives to describe the dominant nature or quality of something, or applied in reference to a fixed or relative position. Characteristics may change with respect to time, thus altering a classification: day (yang) giving way to night (yin) as the hours of each day pass is one example. Daily cycles of the sun (great yang) and the moon (great yin) provided the fundamental basis from which the ancient Chinese developed their principles of yin and yang.

Interacting forces and substances are viewed in light of their yin and yang properties. The designation of appropriate categories is applied at all levels to describe the characteristics of diverse subjects. This includes describing interactions of environmental forces, anatomical features, physiological mechanisms, and pathological conditions. There is an advantage in using specific terms to categorize things or to classify consistent sets of related items. This benefit is apparent when relating physiological processes, or in grouping diagnostic and other data related to pathogenic factors, disease, or dysfunction under yin and yang. When these manifestations are viewed in terms of yin and yang qualities, it greatly improves the understanding of the clinical problem being observed. All physiological and pathological processes can be examined with respect to yin and yang classifications. Treatment approaches are also considered in terms of yin or yang. This type of information is critical in determining the cause of the ailment and the likely course of action in formulating a treatment plan.

The most famous graphic symbol used to illustrate the dual nature and interdependence of yin and yang is the *taiji* figure, which first appeared in the *Yijing (The Simple Classic)* around 600 BC. The taiji graphic shows a black comma-shaped region that takes up one half of the area of a circle, while a similarly shaped, but opposite, white region fills in the rest. Black represents yin qualities while white represents yang. A small white circle is contained in the black region and a small black circle is contained in the white area. These smaller circles convey the idea that there is always a certain amount of yin quality within yang, and conversely there is always some yang quality within yin. The taiji graphic is commonly referred to as the “yin-yang” symbol.

Material substances such as water, wood, and blood, are characterized as yin in nature. Qualities associated with yin are cold, descending, material in nature (liquid or solid), storing, dark heavy, in a lower position, causing inhibition, slow, quiescent, substantial in nature, and feminine. Nonmaterial substances, such as air, flames, and sunlight are considered to be yang. Yang qualities are hot, bright, excited, usually rising, fast, moving, pouring out, light in both weight and color, hollow, insubstantial, upper or exterior, moving in an upward or outward direction, and masculine. The natural world can be viewed in terms of its yin and yang qualities. The importance of this concept lies in recognizing the dual aspects of most dynamic relationships and allows us to view processes in terms of interplay and balance. When applied to humans, these ideas provide a great insight into understanding bodily function and disease.

Richard Esquivel is a Licensed Acupuncturist, trained in Traditional Chinese Medicine. He practices in Evergreen at Healing Touch Acupuncture Clinic, 2724 Aborn Rd. (at White Rd.), San Jose, CA 95121. ph: 408-528-7024, fax: 408-528-8557, email: richard@essentialhealthcare.com