

Practical Basic Theory of Chinese Medicine

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CONTENTS

PREFACE 1

CHAPTER I A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE HISTORY OF
CHINESE MEDICINE 1

CHAPTER II *YIN-YANG* AND FIVE ELEMENTS 6

CHAPTER III *ZANG-FU* ORGANS 17

CHAPTER IV *QI*, BLOOD AND BODY FLUID 40

CHAPTER V CHANNELS AND COLLATERALS 57

CHAPTER VI ETIOLOGY 65

CHAPTER VII DIAGNOSTIC METHODS 78

CHAPTER VIII PATHOGENESIS 94

CHAPTER IX DIFFERENTIATION OF SYNDROMES 98

CHAPTER X CHINESE MATERIA MEDICA 104

REFERENCES 150

CHAPTER I

A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE HISTORY OF CHINESE MEDICINE

Chinese medicine, a summary of experience of the Chinese people in struggling against disease for thousands of years, is invaluable for its rich practical knowledge and a unique integrated theoretical system established since ancient times.

1.1 The origination and development of the theory of Chinese medicine

The theory of Chinese medicine comes mainly from practice and has been enriched and expanded through practice. In the past thousands of years, the publication of *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine*, the earliest of the extant medical classics in China, symbolizes the formation of the new theoretical system of Chinese medicine, which composes of two books: *Plain Conversation* and *Miraculous Pivot*. It is the earliest extant medical canon in China that records the achievements of medicine made by Chinese people in ancient times. Even today, *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine* still plays an important role in guiding the theoretic study and clinical practice of Chinese medicine.

In the last years of the East Han Dynasty, Zhang Zhongjing, based on *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine* as well as his own practice, wrote *Treatise on Exogenous*

Febrile Disease and Miscellaneous Diseases, the first monograph on clinical medicine. The book contributes much to the formation and development of syndrome differentiation and treatment in clinical medicine. His methods and prescriptions are still widely used in and out of China. Because of Zhang Zhongjing's achievement, he is worshiped as the "sage of medicine" by the later generations.

The Jin, Sui and Tang Dynasties witnessed extensive summarization, enrichment and completion of the theory and clinical practice of Chinese medicine.

From the Song Dynasty to the Jin and Yuan Dynasties, various schools of medicine appeared, promoting the development of Chinese medicine. Liu Wansu, Zhang Congzheng, Li Gao and Zhu Danxi were the representatives of these medical schools. Liu Wansu believes that "fire and heat" are the main causes of diseases and the diseases should be treated with drugs in cold and cool nature. Therefore, his theory is known as "the school of cool and cold" by the later generations. Zhang Congzheng believes that all diseases are caused by exogenous pathogenic factors and advocates that pathogenic factors should be eliminated by means of diaphoresis, emesis and purgation. Elimination of pathogenic factors ensures the restoration of the healthy *qi* and cure of disease, so his theory is known as the "school of purgation" . Li Gao holds that internal impairment of the spleen and stomach would bring about various diseases, and therefore emphasizes that the most important thing in clinical treatment should be to warm and invigorate the spleen and the stomach. He is regarded as the founder of the "school of reinforcing the earth" . Zhu Danxi believes that "*yang* is usually redundant while *yin* is frequently deficient" and he usually uses the prescriptions for nourishing *yin* and reducing fire to treat diseases. So his theory is known as the "school for nourishing *yin*" . Though different from each other, these theories enrich Chinese medicine and promote its development because they all develop from clinical practice. That is why they are called "four great doctors in the Jin and Yuan Dynasties" by the later generations.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, *wenbing* (epidemic febrile disease), a new branch in Chinese medicine, appeared. Many doctors made study on the route of infection, pathogenesis and pathological changes of epidemic febrile disease through

clinical practice, gradually establishing a theoretical system of epidemic febrile disease with syndrome differentiation of *wei* (defensive *qi*), *qi*, *ying* (nutrient *qi*), deficiency (blood) and *san-jiao* (triple-*jiao*) as its core. This theoretical system is now a specialty of Chinese medicine.

Chinese medicine has now reached a new stage of development. On the basis of the theoretical study and clinical practice made by the previous generations, Chinese medicine will develop into a new era.

Practical Basic Theory of Chinese Medicine mainly includes the theories of *yin-yang*, the five elements, *zang-fu*, channels and collaterals, *qi*, blood and body fluid, etiology, pathogenesis, methods of diagnosis, differentiation of syndromes and Chinese materia medica.

Acupuncture and moxibustion are important component parts of Chinese medicine. Like other branches, they have developed on the basis of Chinese medical principles. All the contents of acupuncture and moxibustion will be introduced by the chapter of channels and collaterals.

1.2 The characteristics of Chinese medicine

Chinese medicine has many characteristics both in the understanding of the human body's physiology and pathology and in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. These characteristics, however, can be summarized by the concept of holism and syndrome differentiation.

1.2.1 Holism

Holism refers to the concept of the organism as a whole. It is a philosophical viewpoint, which emphasizes the unity and integrity of a thing. Chinese medicine attaches great importance to the unity of the human body itself and its relationship with nature, and holds that the human body itself is an organic whole and has very

close relation with the external natural environment.

The concept of holism in Chinese medicine involves two main ideas: the human body is an organic whole, and its close connection with the environment. Chinese medicine believes that the vital activities of human body take the five *zang* organs as their core. Due to various functional and material relationships, they link the six *fu* organs, five body tissues, five sense organs, four limbs and trunk to form an organic whole. Chinese medicine advocates treatment based on the condition of the human body as an organic whole.

Meanwhile, the natural and social environments always affect the human body's vital activities in multiple ways. The occurrence, development, and final outcome of the human body's diseases are closely related to changes in the environment. Because of this reason, the diagnosis and treatment of Chinese medicine always give careful consideration to the influences from both the natural and social environments. (Tab. 1 – 1)

Tab. 1 – 1 Holism

Five-Zang	Six-Fu	Five Body Tissues	Five Sense Organs	Remarks
heart	small intestine	vessel	tongue	Of the six bowels the <i>san-jiao</i> doesn't coordinate with the five viscera. In the theory of channels and collaterals, they and the pericardium channel are interior-exteriorly related
lung	large intestine	skin & hair	nose	
spleen	stomach	muscle	mouth	
liver	gall bladder	tendon	eye	
kidney	urinary bladder	bone	ear	

1. 2. 2 Syndrome Differentiation

Syndrome differentiation means that doctors who analyze relevant information, signs and symptoms collected through the four diagnostic methods (observation, listening and smelling, inquiring, pulse feeling and palpation) , have a good idea of

the cause, nature and location of a disease, and the relationship between pathogenic factors and the vital energy, and determine the corresponding therapeutic method according to the conclusion of an overall differentiation of symptoms, signs and others.

In clinical treatment, Chinese medicine physicians don't focus their main attention on the similarities and dissimilarities between diseases but on the differences between the syndromes they have. Generally speaking, the same syndromes are treated in similar ways, while different syndromes are treated in different ways.

Of course, diagnosis and treatment based on an overall analysis and differentiation of symptoms and signs should not remain at present level or stand still or refuse to make any further progress, but instead, be enriched, renewed, developed and improved continually alongside the advancing of modern natural sciences.

Therefore, this book gives a general description of the basic knowledge of Chinese medicine.

CHAPTER II

YIN-YANG AND FIVE ELEMENTS

2.1 *Yin-yang* theory

The theories of *yin-yang* and the five elements are two kinds of out-look on nature in ancient China. It involves a naive concept of materialism and dialectics and actively promoted natural science in China. Ancient physicians applied this theory in their field, which greatly influences the formation and development of the theoretical system of Chinese medicine and has guided clinical work up to the present.

The theory of *yin-yang* holds that every object or phenomenon in the universe consists of two opposite aspects, namely, *yin* and *yang*, which are in conflict and in interdependence; furthermore, this relation between *yin* and *yang* is the universal law of the material world, the principle and source of the existence of myriads of things, and the root cause for the flourishing and perishing of things.

The theory of *yin-yang* mainly expounds the opposition, interdependence, wane and wax, and mutual transformation relation of *yin* and *yang*. These relationships between *yin* and *yang* are extensively used in Chinese medicine to explain the physiology and pathology of the human body and serve as a guide to diagnosis and treatment in clinical work.

2. 1. 1 The opposition and interdependence of *yin* and *yang*

The opposition of *yin* and *yang* generalizes the contradiction and struggle of the two opposites within an object or a phenomenon. Ancient physicians used water and fire to symbolize the basic properties of *yin* and *yang*. That is to say, the basic properties of *yin* simulate those of water, including coldness, downward direction, dimness, etc. ; while the basic properties of *yang* are like those of fire, including hotness, upward direction, brightness, etc. It can be inferred that anything that has the characteristics of quiescence, coldness, lower position (or downward direction), interior position (or inward direction), dimness, asthenia, inhibition, slowness, substantial, etc. pertains to *yin*; whereas anything that is moving, hot, upper position (or upward direction), exterior position (or outward direction), bright, sthenic, excited, rapid, non-substantial, etc. belongs to *yang*.

Since the *yin-yang* nature of a thing exists only by comparison and a thing can be divided infinitely, its *yin-yang* nature is by no means absolute, but is relative. In some circumstances the two opposites of a thing may change, and so the *yin-yang* nature of the thing also changes. There exists the conditions of a *yin* aspect developing within *yin*, *yang* within *yang*, *yang* complicated with *yin*, and *yin* complicated with *yang*. This concept conforms with objective reality.

The tissues and organs of the human body may pertain either to *yin* or *yang* according to their relative locations and functions. Viewing the body as a whole, the trunk surface and the four extremities, being on the exterior, pertain to *yang*, while the *zang-fu* organs inside the body pertain to *yin*. Viewing the body surface and the four extremities alone, the back pertains to *yang*, while the chest and abdomen pertain to *yin*; the portion above the waist pertains to *yang* and that below pertains to *yin*; the lateral aspect of the four extremities pertains to *yang* and the medial aspect pertains to *yin*; the channels running along the lateral aspect of an extremity pertain to *yang*, while those along the medial aspect pertain to *yin*. When speaking of the *zang-fu* organs alone, the *fu* organs with their main function of transmitting and

digesting food pertain to *yang*; while the *zang* organs with their main function of storing vital essence and vital energy pertain to *yin*. Each of the *zang-fu* organs itself can again be divided into *yin* or *yang*, e. g. the *yin* and the *yang* of the kidney. And the tissues and structures of the human body and their functional activities all can be generalized and explained by the relation of *yin* and *yang*.

The interdependence relation of *yin* and *yang* means that each of the two aspects is the condition for the other's existence and neither of them can exist in isolation. For instance, without daytime there would be no night; without excitation there would be no inhibition. In short, it can be seen that *yin* and *yang* are at once in opposition and in interdependence; they rely on each other for existence, co-existing in a single entity. The movement and change of a thing are due not only to the opposition and conflict between *yin* and *yang* but also to their relationship of interdependence and mutual support.

In physiological activities, the transformation of substances into function or vice versa verifies the theory of the interdependence relation of *yin* and *yang*. Substance pertains to *yin* and function pertains to *yang*, the former being the basis of the latter, while the latter is the reflection of the existence of the former and also the motive force for the production of the former. Only when there are ample nutrient substances can the functional activities of the *zang-fu* organs be healthy. Contrarily, only when the functional activities of the *zang-fu* organs are sound are they able constantly to stimulate the production of nutrient substances. The coordination and equilibrium between substance and function are the vital guarantee of physiological activities. Hence *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine* notes, “*Yin* is installed in the interior as the material foundation of *yang*, while *yang* remains on the exterior as the manifestation of the function of *yin*” .

2. 1. 2 The wane and wax and inter-transformation of *yin* and *yang*

Wane implies losing or weakening, while wax implies gaining or strengthening. The two aspects of *yin* and *yang* within a thing are not fixed, but in a state of constant

motion. Owing to their mutual conflict and support, the losing or gaining of one aspect will inevitably influence the other. For instance, on one hand, wane of *yin* leads to gaining of *yang*, while wax of *yang* results in gaining of *yin*. On the other hand, gaining of *yin* leads to consuming of *yang*, and gaining of *yang* results in consuming of *yin*. The functional activities of the human body require a certain amount of nutrient substances, resulting in a process of consuming of *yin* and gaining of *yang*, whereas the formation and storing of nutrient substances depend upon the functional activities and weaken the functional energy to a certain degree, causing a process of gaining of *yin* and consuming of *yang*. However, such mutual wane and wax do not result in absolute equilibrium. Under normal conditions these opposites maintain a relative balance, while under abnormal conditions preponderance or discomfiture of *yin* or *yang* occurs.

In the wane and wax process, when there is any manifestation of losing the relative balance of *yin* and *yang* and failing to resume the balance, it results to a preponderance or discomfiture of either *yin* or *yang*. This is the causative factor of the occurrence of disease. That is, whenever *yin* or *yang* is in a state of preponderance or discomfiture, it becomes an etiological factor. For instance, on one hand, preponderance of harmful *yin* will consume *yang*, and discomfiture of *yang* will lead to a preponderance of *yin*, either of which may initiate a cold syndrome; on the other hand, preponderance of harmful *yang* will consume *yin*, and discomfiture of *yin* will cause a preponderance of *yang*, either of which stimulates a heat syndrome. However, the syndromes of cold or heat due to a preponderance of harmful factors pertain to the excess type, while those of cold or heat due to lowering the general resistance pertain to the deficiency type. These two types of syndromes are different in nature and the principles of treatment are consequently also different; i. e. the reducing method for syndromes of the excess type and the reinforcing method for those of the deficiency type.

Since the occurrence of a disease is the outcome of imbalance between *yin* and *yang*, all the methods of treatment should aim at reconciling the two and restoring them to a condition of relative balance. In acupuncture treatment, acupoints on the

right side may be selected to treat disorders of the left side and vice versa, while acupoints on the lower portion of the body may be selected to treat disorders of the upper portion and vice versa. All these methods are based on the concept of regarding the body as an organic whole, and the aim of treatment is to readjust the relation of *yin* and *yang* and promote circulation of *qi* and blood.

The inter-transformation of *yin* and *yang* means that in certain circumstances and at a certain stage of development, each of the two aspects of *yin* and *yang* within one thing will transform itself into its opposite, i. e. *yin* transforms into *yang* and *yang* transforms into *yin*. Whether the transformation actually takes place depends upon whether there exists the possibility of change in the thing itself. Given this possibility, the external conditions are also indispensable.

The development and change of one thing require a process, and the external conditions for transformation maturing gradually. The inter-transformation between *yin* and *yang* follows this rule. According to *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine*, "There must be quiescence after excessive motion; extreme *yang* will become *yin*". And "The generation of a thing is due to transformation; the degeneration of a thing is due to transmutation". This is precisely the meaning of the old saying, "Once a certain limit is reached, a change to the opposite direction is inevitable" and "Quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes".

The inter-transformation between *yin* and *yang* is the universal law governing the development and change of things. The alternation of the four seasons is an example. Spring, with its warmth sets in when the cold winter has reached its height, and the cool autumn arrives when the hot summer has reached its climax. The change in the nature of a disease is another example. A patient with continued high fever in an acute febrile disease may have a lowering of body temperature, pallor and cold extremities with weak and thready pulse, indicating that the nature of the disease has changed from *yang* to *yin*, and then the method of treatment for this patient should be changed accordingly.

The above is a brief introduction to the theory of *yin-yang*, with some examples to illustrate its application in Chinese medicine. In short, the relation of opposition,

interdependence, wane and wax, and mutual transformation relation between *yin* and *yang* can be summarized as the law of the unity. Further, these four types of relationship between *yin* and *yang* are not isolated from each other but interconnected, one influencing the other and each being the cause or effect of the others.

2.2 The theory of the five elements

The theory of the five elements holds that wood, fire, earth, metal and water are basic materials constituting the material world. There exists among them both interdependence and restraint which determine their state of constant motion and change.

The theory of the five elements basically explains the mutual generation, restriction, over-restriction and counter-restriction relationship among them. Its application to Chinese medicine is categorizing different natural phenomena plus the tissues and organs of the human body and the human emotions and interpreting the relationship between the physiology and pathology of the human body and the natural environment. This theory is used as a guide in medical practice.

2.2.1 Attribution of things to the five elements

Man lives in nature. The natural environment, such as weather changes and geographic conditions, greatly influences one's physiological activities. This fact is not only manifested in man's dependence on the environment, but also in his adaptability to the environment. This is known as correspondence between man and nature. Proceeding from this recognition, Chinese medicine comprehensively connects the physiology and pathology of the *zang-fu* organs and tissues with many important natural environmental factors. These factors are classified into five categories on the basis of the five elements. Similes and allegories are used to explain the complicated links between physiology and pathology as well as the correlation between man and the

natural environment. The following tables shows the five categories of things classified according to the five elements.

Tab. 2 – 1 Nature

Five Elements	Season	Environmental Factor	Growth & Development	Color	Taste	Orientation
wood	spring	wind	germination	blue	sour	east
fire	summer	heat	growth	red	bitter	south
earth	late summer	dampness	transformation	yellow	sweet	middle
metal	autumn	dryness	reaping	white	acrid	west
water	winter	cold	storing	black	salty	north

Tab. 2 – 2 Human body

Five Elements	Five <i>Zang</i> Organs	Six <i>Fu</i> Organs	Five Sense Organs	Five Tissues	Emotional Activities
wood	liver	gall bladder	eye	tendon	anger
fire	heart	small intestine	tongue	vessel	joy
earth	spleen	stomach	mouth	muscle	overthinking
metal	lung	large intestine	nose	skin & hair	grief
water	kidney	urinary bladder	ear	bone	fear

2. 2. 2 The inter-generation, inter-restraint, over-restraint and counter-restraint relation of the five elements

2. 2. 2. 1 The inter-generation relation of the five elements

Generation here implies promoting growth. The order of generation is that wood generates fire, fire generates earth, earth generates metal, metal generates water, and water in turn generates wood. In this inter-generation relation of the five elements,

each element is in the position of “being generated” and of “generating”. The generating element is thought of as the “mother” and the generated element as the “son”, which forms what is known as the “mother-son” relationship. Wood, for example, is generated by water, which is the “mother” of wood; while being generated by wood, fire is the “son” of wood.

2.2.2.2 The inter-restriction relation of the five elements

Restriction here connotes bringing under control or restraint. In the restriction relation of the five elements, the principle is that wood restricts earth, earth restricts water, water restricts fire, fire restricts metal, and metal in turn restricts wood. In this relationship, each of the five elements occupies the position of “being restricted” and of “restricting”. For example, wood is restricted by metal, at the same time, it restricts earth.

In the complicated correlation among things, neither generation nor restriction is dispensable. Without generation there would be no birth and development; without restriction, excessive growth would result in harm. For instance, wood generates fire and restricts earth, while earth in turn generates metal and restricts water. In the generation there thus resides restriction, and in restriction there exists generation. They are in opposition and also cooperation, and so a relative balance is maintained between generation and restriction, which ensures the normal growth and development of things. (Fig. 2 - 1)

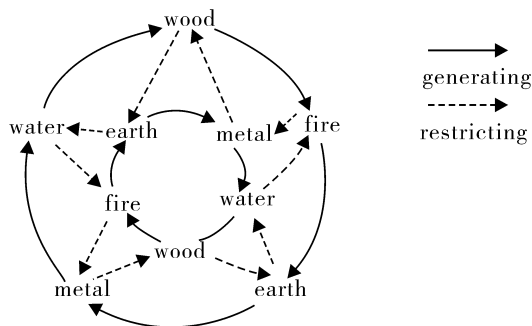


Fig. 2 - 1 Generating and restricting relations among the five elements

2. 2. 2. 3 The over-restriction relation of the five elements

In the complicated correlation among things, a relative balance is maintained between generation and restriction, which ensures the normal growth and development of things. In case of excess or insufficiency in the five elements there will appear phenomena of abnormal restriction known as over-restriction or counter-restriction.

Over-restriction takes the form of launching an attack when a counterpart is weak. Clinically, this is conventionally called over-restriction. For example, “wood over-restricts earth”. The order of over-restriction is the same as that of restriction.

2. 2. 2. 4 The counter-restriction relation of the five elements

Counter-restriction implies preying upon other elements. The order is just opposite to that of restriction.

The phenomena of over-restriction and counter-restriction caused by excess or insufficiency of any one of the five elements often manifest themselves simultaneously. For instance, when wood is in excess, it not only over-restricts earth, but also counter-restricts metal. Another example is that when wood is in insufficiency, it is over-restricted by metal and counter-restricted by earth at the same time.

2. 2. 3 Application of the theory of the five elements

The theory of the five elements can be applied in the medical field, using the inter-generation, restriction, over-restriction and counter-restriction relation of the five elements to expound the interdependence and restrain relation among the *zang-fu* organs, sense organs and tissues, and also the correlation between man and nature. However, the theory is used mainly to explain the changes, etiology and mechanism of the disease.

When an internal organ is inflicted, other organs may be affected, or the disease may spread or change into another kind of disease. Analyzed according to the theory