

Chinese Medical Terminology

FRANK LIU LIU YAN MAU
The Commercial Press, Ltd.

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CHINESE MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

by FRANK LIU, LIU YAN MAU

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PREFACE

Chinese medicine has admittedly been founded on philosophy. It has not only baffled the Western scholar, but also many of the learned Chinese. Nevertheless, Chinese medicine is compatible with science in more ways than one. For some forty centuries, Chinese medicine has endured the test of practicability and has caused to cure the sick and saved lives. Those facts have withstood undeniably the test of time.

This effort to translate the unknown to known quantity is not aimed at argumentation or defence. Nor is it to be regarded as an effort to convince the "unbeliever". The mere attempt at compiling only a few selected terms used in Chinese medicine (which totals more than 4,000) is to be taken as an exercise in straightforward defining and explaining of what has been established as the foundation of Chinese thought down the centuries.

The object of this effort has, too, a practical utility value. This condensed version of Chinese medical terms and terminology is, therefore, intended as a tool to advance better understanding of the overall practice of Chinese medicine.

I cannot help but entertain no small measure of apprehension, lest the attempt should be entirely futile due to its inadequacy. For which I would earnestly solicit comments and criticisms from experts and from all readers who are interested in understanding Chinese medicine.

Frank Liu

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PART ONE

GENERALIZATION AND BASIC CONCEPTS

Section 1 The Shade-and-Sunshine Phases in Nature and Life

陰與陽 *yin-and-yang*

1. *Yin* and *yang*, entirely foreign to the practice of Western medicine, are coupling terms constituting a fundamental tenet in Chinese medical philosophy.
2. Literarily, *yin* and *yang* express opposite situations and diabolically opposed as between “shade” and “sunshine”, negative and positive, the moon phase and sun phase, cryptic (hidden) and phanic (exposed, open).
3. It would require very elaborate treatise to bring forth all of the implications concerning the two basic aspects of nature and “life”. To say that *yin* denotes the “intuitive” and *yang* the “rational” is purely simplistic.
4. The sign of *yin* and *yang* can be likened to the head-and-tail of the same coin, or, more picturesquely, to two tadpoles alongside each other – the tail-end of one being placed in juxtaposition facing the head-end of the other, and be complementary to each other.
5. The doctrine of *yin-and-yang*, the basic tenet, seeks to establish the rationale of bio-tendency: that all organs in the living body exhibit either phase (or, in some instances, both phases) in their functional behaviour; so are diseases resulting from malfunctioning of the organs

as interpreted and attributed to disturbances of *yin* and *yang*.

6. *Yin* and *yang* therefore plays an important role in Chinese medicine since knowledge and determination of *yin* and *yang* presupposes correct diagnoses and effective therapy.

Section 2 Five Primary Elements of Nature

五行 *wu xing*

Literally, 五 *wu* in Chinese is five, and 行 *xing* means movement — that which causes action, motivating activity or reactivity. 五行 *wu xing* has therefore reference to the Five Primary Elements of nature which explain and are responsible for the working principle of any given organ in the living body.

These five elements are : metal, wood, water, fire and earth. In application, the Lungs, Skin, Hairs, and Nose are symbolized by “metal”; Liver, Sinew (Tendons and Ligaments) and Eyes by “wood”; Kidneys, Bones, and Ears by “water”; Heart, Blood-vessels, and Tongue by “fire”; Spleen, Flesh (Muscles) and Mouth by “earth”.

The physiological and pathological relationships of all internal organs rest upon the interaction of the five elements, bringing about harmony (health) or disharmony (illness) in the body.

For example, as “wood” dominates over “earth”, the Liver governs the work of the Spleen. Yet, because of the fact that “earth” begets “metal”, the Spleen promotes the welfare of the Lungs which in turn regulates Liver (since “metal” subdues “wood”).

The working principle as aforestated is congruent with the concept of Complement, Compatibility, and Antagonism. [§ 9]