


Beijing Medical College

DICTIONARY  
OF  
TRADITIONAL  
CHINESE  
MEDICINE



中醫藥詞典



THE COMMERCIAL PRESS, LTD.  
Hong Kong

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**DICTIONARY OF TRADITIONAL  
CHINESE MEDICINE**

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# Preface

Terms of traditional Chinese medicine may number ten thousand. Only those which are of practical use, i.e., those which are commonly used in clinical work and teaching today are listed in this dictionary. Besides the English equivalent of each entry in boldface, most of the entries are given explanations in addition to carry their meaning and implication into English more fully for better comprehension.

The terms are arranged into 12 chapters so that those which are closely related in nature and meaning are grouped together and the readers who know little about traditional Chinese medicine may find it easier to grasp their idea.

Most of the terms of traditional Chinese medicine have specific notions which defy any attempt to find appropriate English equivalents and a few terms still lack commonly accepted definitions. However, the authors have done their best in bringing out the closest, if not the only, meanings of them.

The dictionary is prepared under the guidance of the authorities of the Beijing Medical College. Acknowledgement is made to them and to Dr. Cheng Zhi-fan, head of the Section of Medical History, who checked the entries in Chapter 10, and Drs. Li Sheng-hua, Qin Bo and Zheng Jun-hua of the Department of Pharmacognosy for their help in preparing Chapter 8.

The Editors

# Notes on the Use of the Dictionary

1. This dictionary lists 3,325 commonly-used terms of traditional Chinese medicine and pharmacy, arranged in 12 chapters, with an index appended at the end of it.

2. The terms are in general listed separately, with Chinese phonetic transcriptions, English translation (in boldface) and explanations. Terms easy to comprehend or with notions close to those of terms of modern medicine will have English translations only.

3. Synonymous terms are given in one entry to avoid repetition, but they are separated with semicolons, and provided with Chinese phonetic transcription each, and then followed by their common English translation and explanation. *e.g.*,

肝陰虛 [gānyīnxū]; 肝陰不足 [gānyīn bùzú]

**deficiency of Yin (vital essence) of the liver**, usually due to its being poorly nourished by the blood, marked by . . . . .

Terms which are close in meaning but actually differ from each other are listed separately and marked with (cf...) to refer to related entries.

4. Derived terms of an entry are not listed separately if their meaning is already made clear in this entry. But they are listed separately in the index so that they may be easy to be looked up. *e.g.*

胃 [wèi]

**the (orb of) stomach**..... The cavity of the stomach is called 胃脘 [wèiwǎn]; . . . . .

Here 胃脘 is not given as separate entry.

5. If a term has two or more meanings, the different meanings are given separately and marked with numerals to distinguish one from the other. *e.g.*

寒熱 [hán rè]

(1) cold or heat—two of the Eight Principal Syndromes showing . . . . .; (2) chills and fever

6. The English equivalents of the Chinese terms, if possible, are given in the same part of speech as that of the original. If the Chinese term can be used in different parts of speech, the most commonly used part of speech is adopted in the English translation. In general, the English translation of Chinese terms (except proper nouns or names of drugs) is not initiated with a capital letter, nor terminates with a period, unless it is a complete sentence.

7. Since terms of traditional Chinese medicine often have specific notions and few of them have exact English equivalents, great efforts have been made to make the English translations as close as can be to the original and explanations are given wherever necessary. The content and form of explanations are determined by what is needed and emphasis is laid on elucidation of the essentials. For instance, for terms of differentiation of symptom-complexes stress is put on the description of clinical manifestations; for terms of Chinese drugs and prescriptions, on their actions and indications; for distinguished Chinese physicians in history, on their medical theories and achievements.

8. Some terms of traditional Chinese medicine are widely used in modern medicine. Yet there exists much difference between the two. Though marked distinction is observed between Chinese medicine and Western medicine in describing the structure and functions of the internal organs, 心, 肝, 脾, etc., they are rendered into English as heart, liver, spleen, etc. In defining or explaining other terms, these terms are italicized to remind the readers that they should be comprehended according to traditional Chinese medicine and avoid confusing them with terms of modern medicine.

9. Both English and Latin translations are given to names of Chinese *Materia Medica*, with the latter italicized to distinguish themselves from the former. In explanations, especially in prescriptions names of drugs are generally given in Latin.

10. A lot of books on acupuncture and moxibustion have been published in Western languages. To economize space, we present the acupuncture points in tables instead of describing them separately, and after the fashion accepted internationally, we give their phonetic transcriptions and order numbers only, without any explanation.



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# I Theories of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements

## 陰陽 Yin and Yang

陰陽 [yīnyáng]

**Yin and Yang:** the two fundamental principles or forces in the universe, ever opposing and complementing each other—an ancient philosophical concept used in traditional Chinese medicine to refer to various antitheses in anatomy, physiology, pathology, diagnosis and treatment, e.g., feminine, interior, cold and hypofunction being Yin while masculine, exterior, heat and hyperfunction are Yang.

陰 [yīn]

**Yin:** the female or negative principle, the structive or material aspect of an effective position, e.g., of an internal organ

陽 [yáng]

**Yang:** the male or positive principle, the active or functional aspect of an effective position, e.g., of an internal organ

陰中之陽, 陰中之陰 [yīn zhōng zhī yáng, yīn zhōng zhī yīn]

**Yang in Yin and Yin in Yin:** Yin may be subdivided into Yang and Yin, the resultant Yang and Yin are called Yang in Yin and Yin in Yin respectively, e.g., the night is regarded as Yin in relation to the day, the period from nightfall to midnight is said to be Yang in Yin, and the period of small hours Yin in Yin

陽中之陽, 陽中之陰 [yǎng zhōng zhī yáng, yáng zhōng zhī yīn]

**Yang in Yang, Yin in Yang:** Yang may be subdivided into Yang and Yin, the resultant Yang and Yin are said to be Yang in Yang and Yin in Yang respectively, e.g., the day is regarded as Yang in relation to the night, the early part of the day between dawn and noon is said to be Yang in Yang and the afternoon Yin in Yang

陰陽互根 [yīnyáng hùgēn]

**the interdependence of Yin and Yang**, the existence of the one being the prerequisite of the existence of the other

陰陽消長 [yīnyáng xiāo zhǎng]

**the relative waxing and waning of Yin and Yang**, the two opposites of a single entity, increase or excess of the one means decrease or deficiency of the other, which is usually used in explaining pathological changes

陽生陰長 [yáng shēng yīn zhǎng]

**Growth of Yin depends upon normal development of Yang**, which illustrates the interdependence of Yin and Yang from the aspect of growing.

陰陽轉化 [yīnyáng zhuǎnhuà]

**the transformation of Yin and Yang into each other under certain conditions**, e.g., an illness of heat nature in the extreme may show symptoms and signs of cold nature

陽生於陰 [yáng shēng yú yīn]

**Yang exists with Yin as its prerequisite**, e.g., vital function ( a Yang factor) relies on vital essence ( a Yin factor) as its material basis.

陰生於陽 [yīn shēng yú yáng]

**Yin exists with Yang as its prerequisite**, e.g., the production of vital essence ( a Yin factor) depends on the activity of vital function ( a Yang factor).

陰平陽秘 [yīn píng yáng mì]

**Yin is even and well while Yang is firm**, hence a relative equilibrium is maintained and health is guaranteed.

陰陽調和 [yīnyáng tiáohé]

**harmony of Yin and Yang** by which good health is guaranteed

陰陽失調 [yīnyáng shītiáo]; 陰陽不和 [yīnyáng bùhé]; 陰陽乖戾 [yīnyáng guāilì]

**breakdown of balanced equilibrium of Yin and Yang**, which is believed to be the general pathogenesis of all diseases

陰陽自和 [yīnyáng zìhé]

**restoration of relative equilibrium of Yin and Yang**, indicating recovery of a person from illness

陰勝則陽病 [yīn shèng zé yáng bìng]

**Yin in excess makes Yang suffer**, e.g., if exogenous or endogenous cold ( a Yin factor) prevails, the vital function ( a Yang factor) of the internal organs would be impaired.

陽勝則陰病 [yáng shèng zé yīn bìng]

**Yang in excess makes Yin suffer**, e.g., excessive exogenous or endogenous heat ( a Yang factor) would injure vital essence and body fluid ( a Yin factor).

陰損及陽 [yīn sǔn jí yáng]

**Impairment of Yin would impede the generation of Yang**, e.g., deficiency of vital essence is often complicated by lowered vital function in advanced cases.

陽損及陰 [yáng sǔn jí yīn]

**Impairment of Yang would impede generation of Yin**, e.g., insufficiency of vital function is often complicated by deficiency of vital essence in advanced cases.

重陰必陽 [chóng yīn bì yáng]; 陰極反陽 [yīn jí fǎn yáng]

**Yin in its extreme will give rise to Yang**, e.g., a chronic debilitated case in its extreme may show symptoms and signs of Yang nature such as feeling hot and thirsty, moving restlessly.

重陽必陰 [chóng yáng bì yīn]; 陽極反陰 [yáng jí fǎn yīn]

**Yang in its extreme will give rise to Yin**, e.g., febrile disease with intense heat may bring on symptoms and signs of cold such as chills and cold limbs.

陰陽離決 [yīn yáng lí jué]

**divorce of Yin and Yang**, which means the end of one's life

陽常有餘，陰常不足 [yáng cháng yǒu yú, yīn cháng bù zú]

**Yang is usually redundant while Yin is ever deficient** – a theory advocated by Zhu Dan-xi ( 1281–1358 A.D.), according to which the method of reinforcing Yin ( vital essence) is recommended as a basic principle in treating diseases

## 五行

### The Five Elements

五行 [wǔxíng]

**the Five Evolutive Phases or the Five Elements:** wood, fire, earth, metal and water with their characteristic properties—an ancient philosophical concept to explain the composition and phenomena of the physical universe and later used in traditional Chinese medicine to expound the unity of the human body and the natural world, and the physiological and pathological relationship between the internal organs

相生 [xiāngshēng]

**the interpromoting relation** of the Five Evolutive Phases or Elements in the following sequence – wood, fire, earth, metal and water – in which each Evolutive Phase or Element is conceived to promote or produce the subsequent one, namely, wood produces fire, fire produces earth, earth produces metal, etc.

相克 [xiāngkè]

**the interacting (conquest or checking) relation** of the Five Evolutive Phases or Elements in the following sequence—water, fire metal, wood and earth—in which each Evolutive Phase or Element is considered to check the subsequent one, namely, water checks fire, fire checks metal, metal checks wood, etc.

相乘 [xiāngchéng]

**encroachment** – to check in the severest way, e.g., if wood is redundant in energy, it will encroach on the quality of earth instead of merely checking it, and will violate metal by which it should itself be checked

相侮 [xiāngwǔ]; 反克 [fǎnkè]

**violation** – to check instead of being checked as in the ordinary checking sequence of the Five Elements, e.g., fire checks (violates) water instead of being checked by water

制化 [zhìhuà]

**the promoting (producing) and counteracting (checking) relations** of the Five Elements taken as a whole, which forms a self-limiting balanced process, e.g., wood checks earth which produces metal that will check wood in turn

運 [yùn]

(1) **circuit phase**; (2) **to transmit**

運氣 [yùnqì]

(1) the circulation of the Qi (vital energy); (2) abbreviation of “五運六氣”, the circular movement of the Five Elements (Evolutive Phases) and the Six Atmospheric Influences

五運六氣 [wǔyùn liùqì]

the Five Circuit Phases and the Six Atmospheric Influences

五臟所屬 [wǔzàng suǒ shǔ]

the Evolutive Phases which the Five Viscera correspond to: the *liver*, *heart*, *spleen*, *lung* and *kidney* correspond to wood, fire, earth, metal and water respectively

木喜條達 [mù xǐ tiáodá]

Wood or tree likes to spread out freely – a figure of speech to explain the physiological properties of the *liver* (which corresponds to wood), since the main function of the *liver* is to smooth the flow of vital energy and blood, if it being depressed, symptoms of stagnancy would occur.

木鬱化火 [mù yù huà huǒ]

A depressed liver (corresponding to wood) may give rise to symptoms of fire, marked by headache, dizziness, flushed face, hematemesis, hemoptysis, or even mania.

木火刑金 [mùhuǒ xíng jīn]

Fire of the liver (corresponding to wood) makes the lung (corresponding to metal) suffer by impairing the latter's essence and fluid and brings on dry cough, chest pain, hemoptysis, etc.

木克土 [mù kè tǔ]

Earth is checked by wood, which denotes: (1) the physiological relationship between the *liver* (represented by wood) and the *spleen* and *stomach* (represented by earth); (2) the pathological condition of the *spleen* or *stomach* caused by dysfunction of the *liver*.

火性炎上 [huǒxìng yánshàng]

Fire tends to flare upwards, which figuratively states the fact that the symptoms caused by fire tend to appear on the upper part of the body, esp. on the head, such as headache, sore throat, blood-shot eye, gum bleeding, epistaxis, etc.

火盛刑金 [huǒ shèng xíng jīn], 火旺刑金 [huǒ wàng xíng jīn]

**Excessive fire hurts metal**, which denotes: (1) fire of the *liver* makes the *lung* (represented by metal) suffer; (2) fire in the *heart* or evil heat injures the *lung*.

火不生土 [ huǒ bù shēng tǔ ]

**Fire fails to support earth**; by which is meant that the Yang (functional activities) of the *kidney* or fire of the Vital Gate fails to warm the *spleen* and *stomach* (represented by earth) and bringing on symptoms of indigestion, diarrhea, edema, intolerance of cold, etc.

土生萬物 [ tǔ shēng wàn wù ]

**Earth produces everything**. The *spleen* and *stomach* (corresponding to earth) provide the material foundation for the whole organism by digesting food and transporting nutrients.

土喜溫燥 [ tǔ xǐ wēn zào ]

**Earth prefers warmth and dryness**— an explanation of the physiological properties of the *spleen* (which corresponds to earth). The *spleen* functions well under warm and dry conditions and is liable to be rendered diseased by cold and dampness; a diseased *spleen* often leads to accumulation of dampness with symptoms such as diarrhea and edema.

土不制水 [ tǔ bù zhì shuǐ ]

**Earth fails to control water**, which figuratively denotes failure of the *spleen* (represented by earth) in guaranteeing normal water metabolism, as a result, loose stool, edema, profuse frothy sputum may occur.

金水相生 [ jīn shuǐ xiāngshēng ]

**The lung and the kidney (corresponding to metal and water), promote one another**. If one is diseased, the other is liable to be affected.

金實不鳴 [ jīn shí bù míng ]

**“A muffled gong does not sound”** figuratively referring to sudden onset of hoarseness of voice when the *lung* (corresponding to metal) is attacked by various external pathogenic factors (such as wind and cold, wind and heat).

水性潤下 [ shuǐ xìng rùn xià ]

**Water tends to run downwards** — a metaphor to explain the down-



ward tendency of pathological changes due to dampness such as diarrhea, heaviness and edema of the lower extremities.

水火相濟 [shuǐ huǒ xiāngjì]

Water and fire (referring to the *kidney* and *heart*) complement each other to maintain a balanced interacting – relationship physiologically.

水火不濟 [shuǐ huǒ bùjì]

Water and fire fail to complement each other, denoting the breakdown of a balanced interacting–relationship between the *kidney* and *heart* which correspond to water and fire respectively, hence irritability, insomnia, lumbago and nocturnal emission may occur.

水不涵木 [shuǐ bù hán mù]

Water fails to provide wood with proper nourishment, by which is meant that due to deficiency of Yin (vital essence), the *kidney* (represented by water) fails to nourish the *liver* (represented by wood), as a result, symptoms of internal wind may occur.

母 [mǔ]; 母氣 [mǔqì]

the “mother”: in the producing sequence the evolutive phase that produces, e.g., wood is the “mother” of fire

子 [zǐ]; 子氣 [zǐqì]

the “child”: in the producing sequence the evolutive phase that is produced, e.g., fire is the “child” of wood

子盜母氣 [zǐ dào mǔqì]

A “child” organ may “rob” the “mother” organ. According to the theory of the Five Evolutive Phases applied to pathology, a diseased “child” organ, e.g., the *lung*, may render its “mother” organ, the *spleen*, affected.

母病及子 [mǔ bìng jí zǐ]

A diseased “mother” viscus may get its “child” viscus involved, e.g., a diseased *kidney* may affect the *liver*.

子病及母 [zǐ bìng jí mǔ]

A diseased “child” viscus may get its “mother” viscus involved, e.g., a diseased *spleen* may affect the *heart*.