Chinese Five Phase Theory: Food in Chinese Civilization

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Abstract — Tao and yin-yang are the basis of Chinese philosophy, culture, tradition, and civilization. The term Tao is taken from Lao Tzu’s book, Tao Te Ching (or the Lao Tzu); yin-yang is taken from the Ten Wings (Confucian commentary) in the I Ching.

The primary aim of this paper is to first, utilize Chinese Five-Phase model to better conceptualize the psychological disorder of depression in the context of an individual’s fundamental character or constitution. second, utilize Chinese Yin-Yang food to determine the basic nature of the world. Finally, the Five-Phase typology system is presented as a possible new lens through which to understand and treat depression. The literature regarding Chinese medicine’s Five-Phase theory, along with some of the underlying principles in Chinese Food upon which this theory is based, to explore the validity, efficacy, and function of Tao and the importance of the balance of yin and yang, especially as they relate to understanding food in Chinese civilization of the Tao Te Ching.

It was found that Five-Phase typology model serves as the foundation out of which emerges a more holistic perspective joining the Eastern and Western understanding of depression. The hypothetical clinical examples elucidate the contextualizing and mind/body-integrating possibilities of utilizing the Five-Phase typology system. Interestingly, the results of most frequently mentioned phrases include “Good Food”, “Great Food”, “Good Service”, “Food be Good”, “Great Service”, “Reasonable Price”, “Good Meal”, “Good Restaurant”, “Good Place”, “High Recommend”.

Keywords — five phase theory, yin – yang, food in Chinese civilization

I. INTRODUCTION

Tao and yin-yang are the basis of Chinese philosophy, culture, tradition, and civilization. The term Tao is taken from Lao Tzu’s book, Tao Te Ching (or the Lao Tzu); yin-yang is taken from the Ten Wings (Confucian commentary) in the I Ching, the validity, efficacy, and function of Tao and the importance of the balance of yin and yang, especially as they relate to understanding food in Chinese civilization of the Tao Te Ching. In fact, Five Element theory is the foundation of Chinese disciplines such as feng shui, the martial arts, and the I Ching (The Book of Changes, a text also Universal in its understanding and representation of the dynamic balance of opposites and the processes of unfolding events and change).

The Five Elements are a comprehensive template that organizes all natural phenomena into five master groups or patterns in nature. Each of the five groups—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—include categories such as a season, a direction, climate, stage of growth and development, internal organ, body tissue, emotion, aspect of the soul, taste, color, sound the categories are seemingly limitless. The Five Elements reflect a deep understanding of natural law, the Universal order underlying all things in our world.

It provides a master blueprint that diagrams how nature interacts with the body and how the different dimensions of our being impact each other. When studying the Five Element Framework it is important to emphasize that this multi-dimensional view of life offers a diagnostic framework to recognize where imbalances—body, mind, emotions, and spirit lie. The Five Elements include the internal organs, and the interconnected relationships between them.

The disciplines in Western healthcare, psychology has historically been one of the most embracing of the importance of context in the diagnosis and treatment of illness. Psychotherapists have been particularly attentive to understanding patients’ symptoms within the broad framework of their unique character, personal history, family organization, and individual biology. (Bear Korngold. (2006). Chinese Medicine’s Five-Phase Theory in the Western Clinical Context: A New Conceptual Model for Understanding Depression.)
However, the increasingly focused, reductionist, and standardized trends in Western healthcare, promulgated by the dominant medical model and the economic interests of HMOs and other insurance and pharmaceutical companies, is driving psychology and psychotherapy towards ever more decontextualized, brief, manualized, and targeted approaches that fail to address the complexity and interconnectedness of human health. In addition, the continual compartmentalization of illness and specialization of health care practitioners serve to widen the already gaping divide between mind and body in Western medicine. Ironically, there is a simultaneous growth in awareness of an interest in the mind-body connection in some spheres of health care, to a degree in response to influences from Eastern cultures. With its underlying assumption that all processes and phenomena are interconnected, Chinese traditional medical theory, in particular, offers a coherent paradigm for an integrated understanding of each patient in his/her mind-body context. Chinese Medicine’s Five-Phase theory is a holistic model, describing the unity of both the psychic and somatic aspects of human health and illness, as well as identifying therapeutic direction according to an analysis of an individual from multiple perspectives. Five-Phase theory, using metaphorical terminology, classifies human physiological, mental, and emotional process according to five fundamental categories or Phases—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. These dimensional categories are also used to describe the dominant characteristics of an individual, identifying them as one of five unique types, each of which is descriptive of typical core organizing psychic and somatic characteristics.

Traditional Chinese health belief acculturation is also a continuous process. Traditional health practices of food modification during and after illnesses, seasonal adjustment of foods, and the balance of ‘cold’ or (Yin) and ‘hot’ (or Yang) foods to promote good health were very prevalent. Food is an important part of daily life for many Chinese people. They not only enjoy eating but also believe eating good food can bring harmony and closeness to friends and family. There are many different cuisines in China, and each province has its own special style of cooking (Chan & Lin, 2000; Woo, Leung, Ho & Chan, 1999). The Chinese enjoy shopping daily to get fresh foods from the local market. For example, they will select live seafood, fresh meats, and seasonal fruits and vegetables to ensure freshness for cooking.

II. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this paper is to first, utilize Chinese Five-Phase model to better conceptualize the psychological disorder of depression in the context of an individual’s fundamental character or constitution. second, utilize Chinese Yin-Yang food to determine the basic nature of the world. Finally, the Five-Phase typology system is presented as a possible new lens through which to understand and treat depression. Hypothetical clinical examples are used to illustrate Five-Phase theory’s potential value in providing an expanded and more nuanced context for understanding depressive presentations in individuals. The literature regarding Chinese medicine’s Five-Phase theory, along with some of the underlying principles in Chinese medicine upon which this theory is based, is reviewed to provide a foundation for its clinical relevance and application, and secondly, to explore the validity, efficacy, and function of Tao and the importance of the balance of yin and yang, especially as they relate to understanding food in Chinese civilization. of the Tao Te Ching.

Yin-Yang

In order to understand their world, Ancient Chinese thinkers did what all human cultures do: they began to divide and organize what they observed into categories. Where Chinese thinking diverges from Western thinking, however, is in its understanding of the nature of these divisions. The concept of Yin and Yang captures this unique understanding. As Beinfield and Korngold (1991) state, within the Chinese medical paradigm “[a] 11 states, events, and moments can be characterized as being Yin or Yang” (p. 51). The terms Yin and Yang originated from the Chinese description of the sunny and shady sides of a hill, where Yin represented the shady side and Yang the sunny side (Beinfield & Korngold, 1991). These two sides of the hill contain many opposing characteristics: light (Yang) and dark (Yin), warm (Yang) and cool (Yin), active (Yang) and still (Yin). Yin and Yang are used to connote qualities at either end of a spectrum. They are thus always intricately connected to one another: The cool, darker aspects of the shady side contrast markedly with the warmth and light on the other slope, but they are fundamentally part of the same hill. The qualities of the two sides of the hill are transformatory, not static. (Steinberg & Whiteside, 1999, p. 33) As the sun moves across the sky, what was once the shady side of the hill becomes the sunny side and vice versa. In this way, the Chinese division of observed phenomena assumes that all things are in transition and that they only have meaning in relation to each other. You can not place a plaque labeled
“Sunny” on the sunny (Yang) side of the hill and expect it to correctly identify the nature of that location throughout the day and night. Both Kaptchuck (2000) and Beinfield and Korngold (1991) emphasize that Western thinking relies primarily on notions of cause and effect, whereas the Chinese view focuses its attention on the dynamic aspects of cycles, patterns and relationships. Yin and Yang mutually create, control, and transform into each other (Kaptchuck, 2000). The Chinese were not so much concerned with which came first, the chicken or the egg, but rather their relationship to each other. As Beinfield and Korngold (1991) explain: The chicken makes the egg—Yang generates Yin—but the chicken [also] grows out of the egg—Yin produces Yang. They are only mutually generative. Which came first (linear logic) matters less than how they interact (systems, dialectal, relational logic), (p. 51) Complementary characteristics are only meaningful in relation to each other, and represent “relative aspects of an alternating cycle along a single continuum” (Beinfield & Korngold, 1991, p. 51). Kaptchuck (2000) gives the example of a couple, in which one partner is relatively passive compared to the aggressive qualities of the other. He explains how the passivity (Yin) of the one creates the hospitable environment for the other’s aggression (Yang) and vice versa. The qualities of Yin only exist and have meaning in relation to the qualities of Yang. Thus, there is no big without little, no cold without hot, no pleasure without pain (see Table 1 below for further examples).

Table 1. Yin-Yang Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Hot</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Up</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Introverted</td>
<td>Extroverted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>Stingy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet</td>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Acute</td>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Reticent</td>
<td>Talkative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>Defiant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Qi

When the ancient Chinese were attempting to determine the basic nature of the world around them, they noticed several qualities that were essential to all things, both concrete and subtle (Beinfield & Komgold, 1991). These qualities were movement and change (Hammer, 1990). The Chinese concept of Qi (pronounced “chee”) describes the many aspects of movement and change in the natural world. Traditionally the term was used to describe the “stuff” that is moving and changing, as well as the motion and process of transformation itself (Sivin, 1987).

Though it is not a substance that can be directly observed, Qi is recognized in all its many perceptible manifestations (Beinfield & Komgold, 1991). Nathan Sivin describes the difficulty in grasping such a concept from a Western perspective, “Qi is often the material basis of activity, but the activity itself is often also described as Q i.. .This is not an easy idea for moderns, with their clear distinction between substance and function, to grasp” (Sivin, 1987, p. 47). Thus Qi is not just the stuff of life but also life itself. It is the essential mutable quality of all things, feelings, and processes. As Kaptchuck (2000) states: [F]or the Chinese, everything in the universe, inorganic and organic, is composed of and defined by its Qi. Mountains, plants, and human emotions all have Qi. Qi is not so much a force added to lifeless matter but
the state of being of any phenomena, (p. 43) There is also imbued in the notion of Qi a sense that in its unbridled state, Qi describes and allows for healthy or harmonious movement and change. When a thing or process is unhealthy or disharmonious, its condition can be attributed to a basic blockage, excess, or weakening of Qi. As Beinfield and Komgold (1991, p. 31) note, “If force and Qi are one. Like fresh air, healthy Qi moves freely; like stale air, stagnant Qi is heavy, oppressive, constrictive, and congestive.”

There is a sense of purpose and direction to the movement and change in the natural world. Ancient Chinese observers witnessed the effortless growth, productivity, and harmony achieved by the balanced interchange of natural substances and processes, as well as the damage that resulted from excess, deficiency, and stagnation. As Unschuld (1998) states in his book on Chinese medicine, “The flow moves regularly in one direction, but in pathological states it can change its direction and flow counter to the norm. Of course, blockages are also possible...” (p. 23). Beinfield and Komgold (1991) point out that the Chinese viewed the human body and mind as a “microcosm of the universe that surrounded them” (p. 5). This is the basis of Beinfield and Komgold’s (1991) description of the human body, from the Chinese perspective, as a garden: an organic mini-ecosystem composed of interdependent parts, all needing sufficient nutrition and balance in order to thrive. This view is contrasted with the Western notion of the body as a machine, able to be dissected into functional and dysfunctional parts that can be manipulated independently to cure specific ailments. Qi is the motive force and process by which the human garden is sustained. Just as the many aspects of Yin and Yang derive meaning only in relation to each other, so too Qi takes as its basic premise that all things are interconnected and are therefore dependent on each other for meaning, vitality, and health: “When the elements of nature are in balance, life is harmonic and flourishes. When the balance of polar forces is upset, disaster looms” (Beinfield & Komgold, 1991, p. 29).

Qi serves many functions in Chinese traditional medicine. As will be seen during the course of this journey through Chinese medical theory, dividing form, function and process into five components is a repeated pattern. The five major functions of Qi, according to Kaptchuck (2000), are that it is the source of all movement, protects the body, is the source of harmonious transformation, ensures stability and governs retention, and warms the body. Qi is responsible for and synonymous with physical movement, the movement of fluids and overall metabolic dynamism in the body, the movement of ideas and emotions in the mind, and the movement of growth and development in human life. As a protective force, strong Qi is essential in fighting off pathogens that threaten to infect the body and mind, not unlike the Western medical notion of the immune system, or the psychological concept of ego strength.

In Chinese medicine, the doctor’s role is to aid in the restoration of balance to the human body and mind, offering supplemental support to systems that are weakened and reigning in processes that have become excessive (Beinfield & Komgold, 1991). When first diagnosing illness, the Chinese traditional doctor looks for the root of the disturbance by discerning what imbalances are evident in a person’s basic life force, flow, or Qi. There are three primary states of imbalance in Chinese medicine: excess, deficiency and stagnation. When there is an over-abundance of something in the system, it is a sign of excess (Steinberg & Whiteside, 1999). Excess can result from too much coming in from outside, such as over-eating, stress, or viruses and bacteria, or it can develop internally from blockages in various processes or systems that cause over-accumulation (Steinberg & Whiteside, 1999). Deficiency is the result of the depletion or scarcity of necessary resources. This can occur when there is an increased demand within or outside an individual, and the lack of necessary compensation leads to a shortage (Steinberg & Whiteside, 1999). Finally, stagnation occurs when the Qi is unable to move freely, and physical or mental blockage occurs, resulting in such symptoms as swelling, distention, frustration, and inertia. These imbalances are often referred to as isharmonies in Chinese traditional medicine. As Beinfield and Komgold (1991) explain: The source of disease is any challenge to the body with which it is unable to cope, whether it is a harmful substance or bad feeling. Disease is a manifestation of an unstable process, a pattern of disharmonious relationships. When defenses are weakened and resources exhausted, a multiplicity of factors conspire to permit illness, (p. 36)

**Yin and Yang Theory: Encompassing Everything in the Universe**

This symbol, which most people have seen in a variety of contexts, pares things down to one clear and elegant image. As far as symbols go, it just doesn’t get more fundamental than Yin-Yang. Like Einstein’s famous equation, E = mc², the Yin-Yang symbol describes something very elemental and incredibly complex. What Yin-Yang points to and represents is so vast it encompasses everything in the Universe.
Integral to Chinese Culture for Thousands of Years

Yin and Yang, like TCM’s Five Element theory, are integral to the Chinese culture and have been so for thousands of years. Unbelievably, references to Yin and Yang date back as far as 700 B.C.E. to the *I Ching* (*The Book of Changes*, a text Universal in its understanding and representation of the dynamic balance of opposites and the processes of unfolding events and change). Yin and Yang are distinctively Chinese in terms of perception of profound fundamental principles and as an expression of a unique way of viewing the world and the greater universe. They are literally and figuratively a world apart from Western thinking.

**Opposite yet Complementary Energies**

Everything contains Yin and Yang. They are two opposite yet complementary energies. What does this really mean? Although they are totally different—opposite—in their individual qualities and nature, they are interdependent. Yin and Yang cannot exist without the other; they are never separate. For example, night and day form a Yin-Yang pair. (Night is Yin and day is Yang.) Night looks and is very different than day, yet it is impossible to have one without the other. Both create a totality, a complete whole.

This inseparable and interpenetrating relationship is reflected in the form of the Yin-Yang symbol. The small dots within each of the two energies (represented by black and white) symbolize that there is always some Yin (black) within Yang (white) and vice versa. No matter where you bisect the diameter of the whole circle, each half will always contain some Yin and some Yang. Nothing is absolute with Yin and Yang. The designation of something as Yin or Yang is always relative to some other thing. For example, day is Yang, yet within every day is a Yang part—the early morning, and a Yin part—late day, as it begins to turn to night, which is Yin.

**Balance and Harmony**

In the Chinese Yin-Yang model, Yin (the black) contains a seed of Yang (in the form of a white dot). There is Yin, but interestingly, Yin is also Yang because it contains some Yang. The truth is Yin can transform into Yang under certain conditions. It can do this because Yang is present in Yin. So there is balance, but the relationship goes beyond balance to one of harmony. When two things are balanced, they are equal but still separate. In a relationship of harmony, the two energies blend into one seamless whole, as perfectly embodied by the swirling Yin-Yang symbol.

This means there’s a dynamic flow happening that automatically and continuously balances and rebalances these energies. In the natural world this phenomenon is seen in the changing of the seasons: the cold of winter yields to the warmth of spring and summer heat, and then gradually turns cool in fall to become winter once again. You can also see this perpetual balancing at work in a shorter time frame when a thunderstorm clears the air of an unusually hot and humid summer day.

In terms of your personal health, if you think of how you feel when you feel really well, you might realize you don’t think of wellness at all! Everything in your life just flows and moves seamlessly—in harmony. Your body, mind, emotions, and spirit can adjust and readjust to the circumstances in your life. This is precisely the state TCM seeks to create; that of balance.

**Five-Phase Theory: A Theory Rooted in Nature**

Qi is the essential force underlying movement and change. As such, it flows through and assists in the transition of the seasons. As described above, Chinese medical thinkers focused on the repetitive patterns they observed in the natural world. The dynamic quality of five distinctive seasonal stages were identified and matched with one of five corresponding Phases. It was observed that Spring is characterized by a surging upward, growth, and sudden change. Spring is thus identified with the Phase of Wood. (The elemental names of the Five Phases are capitalized to identify them as terms capturing all of the qualities of a given Phase, as opposed to referring to the physical elements themselves.)
Summer is distinguished by fullness, heat, a high rate of activity, expansion, and the diffusion and merging of things. These qualities are associated with the Phase of Fire. In the Autumn nature exhibits signs of contraction, cooling off, and a returning to separation as leaves and fruits fall from the trees. This period is associated with the Phase of Metal. During Winter movement stops, it is dark, cold, internal, and contracted.

Water is the Phase associated with this season. The fifth season could be described as the season of transition that occurs between the four other seasons. It is analogous to the moment between inhalation and exhalation, or the still eye of the storm around which activity revolves. This fifth season is often designated as Late Summer, but also brackets and connects the four other seasons. Earth is the Phase connected with this fifth season. This identification of five fundamental Phases in nature forms the basis of the division of the Five Phases and their corresponding elemental metaphors, the details of which will be expanded upon in a later section.

System of Correspondences

As represented above in the pairing of seasonal phases with one of the Five Phases, one of the key distinguishing characteristics of the Chinese medical paradigm is the use of descriptive language that expresses basic qualities, functions, and processes. This is in stark contrast to the Western bias toward concrete classifications of disease types, physiological structures, and chemical imbalances. The use of qualitative language is at the heart of the Five-Phase model and its underlying foundation in the System of Correspondences.

Chinese medical theory was born out of the observation of natural phenomena, and the recognition of consistent patterns and qualities from the macrocosm to the microcosm and all phenomena in between. Thus, the essential qualities identified in the seasonal Phases above were seen to exist within the human mind and body as well. It was from this observation that the System of Correspondences was developed. In this system all things bearing similar qualities, or performing similar functions, are closely related to each other regardless of how disparate they might seem to a Western sensibility. As Beinfield and Komgold (1991) explain, “The logic is one [in which] things that correspond to the same thing correspond with each other” (p. 39).

According to this principle, all things are linked by primary, underlying, similar natures. In Chinese medicine, nothing exists outside of this model. Everything has its Yin and Yang aspects, as well as its place along the spectrum of the Five Phases. For example, when exposed to extreme heat, flesh becomes warm, red, sometimes swells, and may even rise into a blister. As Beinfield and Komgold (1991) state, any of these symptoms occurring for any reason, be it acne, infection, or anger are attributed to excess Fire or Heat. Beinfield and Komgold (1991) explain: To illustrate, when Fire burns the skin, it causes redness, swelling, and pain. When these symptoms arise spontaneously, they are considered to be due to the presence of internal Fire or Heat...Since Heat produces inflammation, symptoms of inflammation are referred to as signs of Heat. (p. 39)

Thus, the emphasis in the Chinese medical model is not primarily focused on locating the single cause of a given symptom, or in attributing a symptom to either physical or psychological causes, but rather on the accurate description of the symptom in order to understand its basic nature, and thereby determine which imbalances need to be corrected. If a person is too “hot” (i.e. feverish, swollen, irritated, inflamed), then she or he requires “cooling” interventions or assistance in supporting his or her internal capacity for cooling down. This could involve physically cooling interventions, more behaviorally calming and quieting techniques, or both. Western language embraces this correspondence thinking more so than Western medicine. The term “irritation” applies to both a red, itchy rash and the emotional state of being annoyed or aggravated. In Chinese medicine these are related phenomena arising from a similar source (Beinfield & Komgold, 1991). The priority in Chinese medicine is discovering how all aspects of symptom presentation are related. As Beinfield and Komgold state (1991), “The emphasis is upon describing the way phenomena fit together, that is, the context, rather than explaining why they occur” (p. 396). This underlying System of Correspondences permeates Five-Phase theory (see Table 2 below).
Table 2. Five-Phase Correspondences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Correspondence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Late Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dampness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Spleen Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Completion</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Dampness</td>
<td>Dryness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>Kidney Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poise</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td></td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sorrow</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhibition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Death/Germination</td>
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Food, eating behavior, and culture in Chinese Civilization

Chinese cuisine is usually classified into four broad categories: Beijing cuisine (Mandarin cuisine) in the north, Shanghai cuisine in the east, Sichuan cuisine in the west, and Cantonese cuisine in the south. Each has an individually developed food culture. [This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).]

The social functions of food

Food is not only the source of nutrition for human, but also plays various roles in our daily life, beliefs, and socioeconomics.

1.1. Establish and maintain interpersonal relationship

Food has many symbolic meanings; it not only expresses but also establishes the relationship between people and their environment as well as between people and what they believe. Therefore, food is an important component of a society. Food consumed by one person alone is not a social food. However, when it is consumed by a group of people together or eaten in a religious ceremony, the sociality of food is identified. In human society, food is a means for people to establish and express relationships between one another. This relationship can exist among individuals, community members, religious groups, and ethnic groups. For instance, in the Spring Festival in China, people eat dumplings to express the relationship between themselves and God (Fig. 1).

“Everything that appears in the physical realm is always connected with energy flow at the invisible level.” - Nan Lu

Fig. 1. People eat dumplings to express the relationship between themselves and God in the Spring Festival in China.
1.2. Express the degree of interpersonal relationship Different foods convey different meanings among the eaters and indicate the closeness of the relationship. In Chinese culture, service of expensive and rare foods usually shows the respect to the guests. A formal dinner includes 4-6 cold dishes, 8-10 hot dishes, served with soup and fruits. A usual family dinner serves close friends. Close friends or colleagues usually go to food stalls for dining and drinking. Eating a lunch box together is a normal work relationship, and intimate lovers will have candlelit dinner together.

1.3. Represent social status Foods can be used by people to express their social status. Rare and expensive food is frequently used to represent wealth and high social economic status. These foods are normally animal food and rich in protein, and are hard to obtain because of the rareness, expensiveness, or the need for importation. This custom is mainly related to the upper class living style, for instance, bird's nest, shark's fin, bear's paw, and lobster in traditional Chinese society.

1.4. As a group characteristic Food can not only indicate the social status, but also can be used as a character of one group, divided by regions, families, races or religions. Each country has a State Banquet. Some countries such as China, France, and Italy are famous for their cuisine, delicious food, and food culture. Eating behavior, once formed, has continuity. When people moving to other regional or countries, will continue keeping their traditional eating habit, taste, and cooking methods, unless in very special cases, otherwise it is hard to change. In China, rice is usually the staple food for people living in the south of China, while food made of wheat flour such as steamed bread, bread, and buns is the staple for people living in the north (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Rice is usually the staple food for people living in the south of China.

Even when travelling or moving to a foreign country, people tend to eat the food which eating usually as the first choice. Many Chinese people in foreign countries, even after years of migration, still maintain the habit of eating Chinese food, which is very difficult to change.

1.5. Celebrate important event Owing to its function to express the central position in the representation and relationship, a dinner or banquet can be used as a symbol of the important events in human life, such as wedding, baptism, and religious belief. The symbolic significance of food eaten in religion is more important than the nutritional value; for example, the consumption of these foods can determine and reestablish the relationship between man and God, and between people.

1.6. Symbolic significance In Chinese culture, foods have been used as symbols of meaning in many occasions, to impart different information. Chinese dates mean that the couples can have children early; peanuts, also known as the longevity fruit, mean longevity; oranges and chestnuts mean good luck; rice cakes, promotion year; seaweed is a homonym of rich; noodle is long, which means health and longevity; and glutinous rice balls means the family stay together. In Chinese wedding customs, the man has to send to the woman's home wine (long and long) or fish (annual and superabundant). However, egg (more and more strange) or lotus root (a section of arrowroot is separated, but the clinging fiber remains) must not be used as a gift. In some areas, however, after the birth of a child, eggs dyed red by parents are sent to relatives and friends, to show auspiciousness. Some foods are a symbol of bad luck, such as pear, which sounds like away, and eating it could mean separation.

1.7. Means of reward or punishment Food is often used as a means of reward or punishment. For example, when a child has good school performance, parents may take them to a western fast food restaurant as a reward. While a child does not have good performance, then their parents do not give the child the food they want by way of punishment.
How Yin and Yang Apply to You and Your Life

You might be wondering how Yin and Yang apply to you and your life, and to any health issues you might have. Theories are interesting, but unless they have some meaning to your own experience, what’s the point?

First, the theory of Yin-Yang tells us that at the macro level—the largest scale imaginable—all things are always balancing and rebalancing into a state of perfect harmony. Yes, there is ceaseless change, yet this movement and flux, at its deepest level, is creating harmony, is perfect harmony. Yin and Yang are the two energies that embody Universal law, which ensures that all things remain in harmony.

It’s often difficult to actually see this harmony on a smaller scale, in the world around us, for instance. It isn’t always apparent in the world humans have created and especially in our busy, frequently complicated modern lives. But think about it: if you really understand and believe in Yin and Yang, harmony is the Universal architectural framework that underlies and impacts this reality. So in essence, harmony is the only ground we walk on and is the very air we breathe.

How can you apply this awareness to your life? A great part of Five-Phase Theory’s healing approach is to help you step back from your life and look at where your life might actually be creating health issues for you. For most people, this is a process that happens over time. For some, it comes in a moment of great insight. From the Five-Phase Theory perspective, what is the point of continually treating symptoms that are caused by emotions, patterns of thought, belief systems, or a lifestyle that is out of balance? Truly, isn’t it better to understand and work to change the root cause (or causes) of the problem? The entire Universal pattern is one of establishing balance and harmony. This perspective can help you more peacefully view the world and your role in it.

Most people have heard the saying, “As above, so below.” If Universal law is all about creating and maintaining harmony, wouldn’t the limitless power of that energy force support in some way your own efforts to create harmony in your own body and being? As a deep and authentic healing system, Five-Phase Theory understands and applies Yin and Yang to help you harmonize your body, mind, emotions, and spirit, and then harmonize your individual energy with nature.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The theory of Yin and Yang is fundamental to the practice of Five-Phase Theory in terms of understanding, diagnosing, and treating health issues. At the most basic and deep level, Five-Phase Theory treatment seeks to balance Yin and Yang in each person. One ancient Five-Phase Theory text expressed the power and importance of Yin and Yang this way: “If you can understand Yin and Yang you can hold the universe in your hands.”

Chinese traditional medical theory offers a coherent paradigm for contextualizing patients and the concerns they bring to therapy. Chinese Medicine’s Five-Phase theory is a holistic model, describing both the psychic and somatic aspects of human health and illness. This theory classifies human physiological, mental, and emotional process according to five fundamental categories—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. These categories are also used to describe the dominant qualities of an individual, classifying them as one of five unique types, each of which embodies a different pattern of core organizing characteristics. The practice of psychodynamic psychotherapy is particularly well-suited for the use of this context-driven framework Interestingly, the results of most frequently mentioned phrases include “Good Food”, “Great Food”, “Good Service”, “Food be Good”, “Great Service”, “Reasonable Price”, “Good Meal”, “Good Restaurant”, “Good Place”, “High Recommend”.

IV. REFERENCES


