

The Great Principle of Yin & Yang

by Ron Teegarden



Cycles can be most easily understood by recognizing the rhythmic shifting from one pole to its opposite. Just as every process of Nature shows cyclicity, every process has a polar nature. Though oneness is the primary law of the universe, this fundamental two-dimensional view of Nature generates the concept known as “the Great Principle” to the Chinese.

The Great Principle is the law of Yin and Yang. The Great Principle of Yin and Yang provides a uniquely exquisite model of the universe, for it provides a basis for understanding the fundamental pattern of all processes. Yin-Yang is not a “mystical” concept devoid of meaning and value in the scientific age. Far from it! Actually, it is extremely logical, obvious, and practical beyond compare.

As explained previously, everything changes cyclically. Cycles occur as phenomena oscillate rhythmically between energetically active phases and resting phases. The great Chinese philosophers of old categorized all phenomena in the overtly active stage of its cycle as Yang. All phenomena in its covert, quiet stage are considered as Yin. Many people try to explain Yang as the “male,” positive force, and Yin as the “female,” negative counter-force. This is a great oversimplification and is in fact quite misleading. It is far more fundamental to perceive Yin and Yang in terms of energetics.

The secret to truly understanding Yin and Yang is in the old saying attributed to Taoist master Huang-Keu:

**“The Yin conserves
and
the Yang radiates.”**

Within all processes there is a time during which energy must be consumed, assimilated and stored. During this phase, energy is drawn inward and concentrated, perhaps even bound as energized matter. This phase is Yin. Once energy sufficient to the needs of the entity or process at work is accumulated and processed so as to be usable, the energy is expended and the entity or phenomena becomes outwardly, expansively energetic, perhaps even explosive or aggressive. This expansively active stage is called Yang. When the energy has been expended, the phenomena automatically seeks new sources of energy and begins the Yin, accumulative phase. Thus the cycle can repeat itself, though each cycle will bear changes that are in harmony with other cyclic processes occurring in its sphere of influence. Examples of this process are end-

less. Let us take a few simple examples:

A cloud

Water evaporates from the surface of the Earth until sufficient quantities of moisture coalesce to form a cloud (Yin stage—accumulation, concentration and storage). When the cloud is concentrated to capacity, rain falls, alleviating the pressure within the cloud (Yang stage—release of energy in the form of activity).

A star

Cosmic gases accumulate and condense (Yin stage). A star is thus formed. Energy is radiated (Yang stage) until the star burns itself out.

The heart

Electrical energy flows through the nervous system into a special nerve unit (the A-V node) in the muscle of the heart. Energy builds and builds until the nerve unit reaches capacity. Until this instant, the heart is in its so called “resting” stage. But we know that “rest” is really a phase of accumulation and concentration of the energy needed for the next phase, activity. During the “resting” stage, blood is also accumulated into the chambers of the heart. This “resting” stage is Yin. At the moment of energy saturation, the accumulated energy is discharged throughout the heart muscle causing a strong contracting action, forcing the blood out of the heart and into the lungs and other parts of the body. This Yang, “working” phase is then automatically followed by a Yin stage of energy accumulation (“rest”).

The mind

As we receive information through our senses, this information is sorted and stored in the body-mind. This accumulation of information is thus Yin. When we act based upon our knowledge, experience and understanding, we are utilizing information previously received. This active stage is Yang. Of course much of the knowledge upon which we base our actions is not accumulated during our individual lifetime, but has been stored in our genetic material and has been passed on to us genetically. Instinctive knowledge is of such biological importance that Nature has built it right into our very being, and for this reason should never be ignored, though it must often be controlled.

The above examples can be expanded considerably. Upon examination, one realizes that the pattern is

universal. Of course, no cycle stands alone, for every eyelid process is touched and influenced by many other cyclic processes. In these interactions, Yang causes Yin, and vice versa. To give, someone must receive; to strike, something must be stricken; to love, something must be loved.

On a physiological level, we know for example that for movement to occur in ones arm, a muscle (or actually, a set of muscles) must contract (active, Yang stage). Concurrently, a muscle (or set of muscles) which would prevent this action or would cause an opposite effect, must relax (passive, Yin stage). In a dynamic sense, the coordination of these active and passive actions of the muscles must occur in superb harmony for coordinated physical movement to occur.

Another beautiful example of Yin-Yang in human physiology lies in the nervous system. The Autonomic Nervous System is that aspect of the human nervous system that controls all of our automatic, subconscious functions. There are two components of the Autonomic Nervous System, known as the parasympathetic and sympathetic. Here is how the Autonomic Nervous System is described in a medical text recently published by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine:

“The physiological significance of the autonomic nervous system has been described by Pick in the following way: The parasympathetic or cranial sacral component is essentially an anabolic system, because it is directed toward the preservation, accumulation, and storage of energies in the body. In contrast, the general effect of the sympathetic nervous system is catabolic because it causes the expenditure of bodily energies and inhibits the intake and assimilation of nutrient matter. There is, therefore, a high degree of stability of bodily function under the dual control of the autonomic nervous system.”

The Autonomic Nervous System exemplifies how the entire physiological process occurs. Every action and function of life takes place as opposing forces interact, first with one force predominating then the other. Every hormone, enzyme, and chemical in the body is matched by an opposing substance. If a hormone is discovered that stimulates a certain function, scientists automatically start their search for its antithesis which inhibits the action or otherwise results in an opposite response.

Another law of Yin and Yang is that opposites attract. For example, positive ions unite chemically with negative ions. In this way, a more stable, content state

of being can exist. In the same way men and women attract. It is often said that men are Yang and that women are Yin. This is because men provide sexually and women receive. Also, men generally tend to be essentially aggressive when compared to women. But this is clearly an oversimplification. Men and women both have Yin and Yang aspects. In a relationship where a man is the assertive partner, he can be said to be the Yang partner and the woman the Yin. However, the opposite is often the case, and there are many women that are much more Yang than many men. Yang and Yin are relative terms when considering opposing forces. One man might be more aggressive than a woman, and he is therefore (relatively) the Yang partner and she the Yin. But she may be more aggressive than another man she knows and in this relationship she is the Yang partner. In either case, satisfaction is possible if balance is achieved.

It is a fundamental tenet of Yin and Yang that everything has its front and back sides. The wise can see both sides even while only one side is apparent. "Hot" is a term understood only in relation to "cold," "up" exists only relative to something that is "down," "behind" exists because of what is in "front." Thus the sayings: "everything that has a front has a back," and "the bigger the front the bigger the back." So often we see in humans outward strength that really hides inner fear and weakness. Occasionally we see the opposite. The saying, "the bigger they are the harder they fall" is a perfect example of Yin-Yang thinking in terms of the vulnerability of the inflated ego. For this reason, sages from all cultures have encouraged humility, and it is said that "the meek shall become great."

It is essential that we always remember that Yin and Yang are two yet one. Each contains something of the other. All things contain both. Though they appear to conflict, they in fact support one another and the two forces are mutually responsible for all change. There is no place in the universe that is free from the influence of the pairs of opposites. As the old saying goes:

"From Yang springs illumination, and from Yin darkness; yet you cannot separate them one from another."

The Great Principle of Yin and Yang can easily become incorporated into our basic logic, even if we do not use these terms per se. For it is the nature of existence to oscillate between opposites and in this way to

Chu Hsi said:

"The Yang transmutes and the Yin preserves. The Yang and the Yin manifest as motion and rest; moving to the utmost and resting, resting to the utmost and moving. Hence in the Yin is the Yang, and in the Yang is the Yin, inseparably interwoven, and it is thus, as a unity, that they are said to be one with Tao."

maintain balance. Our awareness of this universal law can help liberate us from so many bonds artificially created by ourselves and society. Rigidity of mind and body are our own worst enemies. Flexibility with inner strength is the key to a long and happy life.

The principle of Yin and Yang is not a difficult concept to understand or to use. Its very simplicity, however, has made it subject to oversight. We can see it everywhere and in everything. We know it innately. It is so primal that it is in our souls and motivates the course of the Milky Way. It is the law of relativity and periodicity. It is expressed as rhythm, the shifting dominance of opposing forces. To recognize the unity and flow of this process is the key to wisdom.

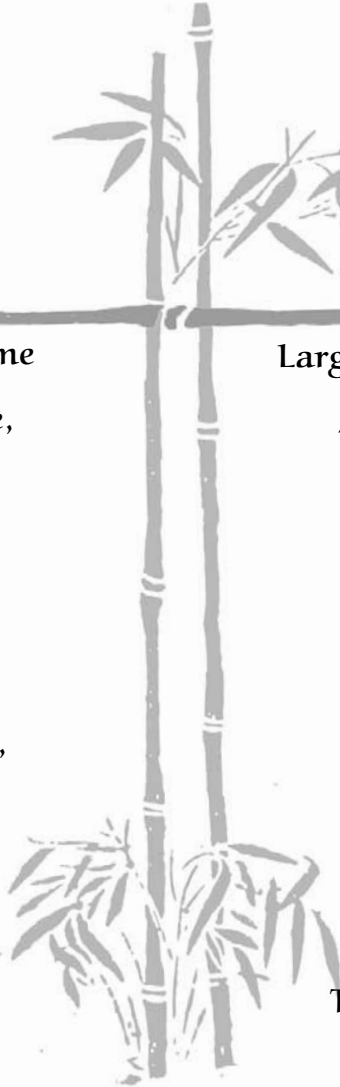
If you tend to have more of a Yang constitution, you will tend to take more risks and be more aggressive in life than less Yang people. Yang people generally live fast lives and tend to burn the candle at both ends. Yang people, while they are young, tend to think of themselves as invincible. Therefore, they often burn themselves out and suffer from acute illnesses and radical breakdowns. If you have a Yang constitution, you need to consume Yin tonic herbs in all its various aspects. Yang herbs may be consumed as well to sustain your Yang nature, but only in conjunction with Yin herbs and usually in only moderate quantities. Yang people generally do better when they consume "cool" herbs.



AM I YIN OR YANG

The Yin - Yang Self Analysis Test

In order to best take advantage of the Chinese tonic herbs, it is wise to determine your Yin-Yang balance. The following table provides a few of the markers that can help you to understand whether you have a Yin or a Yang constitution.

Yin Constitution		Yang Constitution
Thin bones and frail frame		Large bones and sturdy frame
Passive, timid, receptive, quiet Nature		Aggressive, outgoing, assertive Nature
Pale tongue		Optimistic attitude
Pessimistic attitude		Strong radial pulse
Slow to respond		Quick to respond
A tendency toward fear, anxiety or melanchol		Ruddy complexion
Pale complexion		Red tongue
Weak radial pulse		Easily angered, a fiery disposition
Low testosterone or Estrogen-dominant		Testosterone-dominant
Sexually passive		Sexually aggressive

If you tend to have a more Yin constitution, you will tend to be more passive and cautious. You will be aware of your frailty and will naturally shy away from dangers that you instinctively know could harm you. Yin people tend to develop chronic ailments that just linger on. These chronic ailments are often not as serious in appearance as the acute illnesses that Yang people contract, but over time they can be severely draining and debilitating. Yin people need to take plenty of both Yin and Yang herbs. The Yin herbs re-

plenish the energy lost Yin energy. The Yang herbs are necessary to replace, in a sense, the Yang energy that is not their by constitution. Yin people tend to do better with "warm" herbs.

Most people do well with a balanced blend of Yin and Yang herbs, only slightly balanced in one direction or another, based on their original constitution. In fact, we all need to nourish both Yin and Yang throughout life if we hope to achieve radiant health.