SOUTHWEST ACUPUNCTURE COLLEGE

OBJECTIFICATION OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS AND THE CRUMBLING FOUNDATIONS OF ORIENTAL MEDICINE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ACUPUNCTURE GRADUATE SCHOOL

BY JONAS R. SKARDIS O.M.D., DR.AC., M.AC., LIC.AC., DIPL.AC.(NCCA), N.D.(HON)

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO JUNE, 1987
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated
to the administration and faculty
of Southwest Acupuncture College.
ABSTRACT
In China and elsewhere, the rudimentary theorems of traditional Oriental medicine, including the five element theory, are falling into disuse. They are also attracting criticism for inconsistency and illogic. This paper begins by establishing the importance of theoretical foundations to the development of Oriental medicine in the West. It proceeds, by extensive reference to the English language literature, to identify the problem with faulty interpretation of the five element theory and its separation from yin/yang theory. After discussion of potential consequences and causes, the thesis concludes with a proposal for ideological, intellectual, and linguistic reform of the theory into a process-oriented five phase theory.
NOTES ON STYLE

This thesis follows conventions of style set forth in sources provided by Southwest Acupuncture College.\(^1\),\(^2\) The prescribed style is adhered to precisely, except for the following:

The title page, front matter headings, and chapter headings are set in Bookman Demi (bold) uppercase 18 point instead of a typewritten uppercase (12 point).\(^3\)

Headings of the next level, referred to by Turabian as "first-level subheading," are here set in Bookman Demi (bold) 12 point instead of typewritten underlined (12 point).\(^4\)

Names of books in both the footnotes and the section on Sources Consulted are set in Bookman italic 12 point instead of typewritten

\(^1\) Southwest Acupuncture College, Thesis Guidelines (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Southwest Acupuncture College, 1986).


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 3.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 7.
underlined (12 point).\footnote{Ibid.} 

All the above changes were made to take advantage of the typeset format of this paper, and the changes conform generally to form followed in typeset publications of scholarly format.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ................................................................................................................... iv
Abstract ....................................................................................................................... v
Notes on Style ........................................................................................................... vii
Table of Contents ..................................................................................................... ix

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION
  Foundations in Peril .................................................. 2
  Prohibitions and Mandates Relating to this Work .......... 6
  The Importance of Theoretical Foundations
    Base Theory and Professional Compromise ............... 9
    Development of a Psychology of Oriental Medicine .... 11
  Conflict Between Western Schools of Acupuncture ... 14
  Complicating Factors ................................................ 16

CHAPTER II: OBJECTIFICATION OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS
  Overwhelming Dependence on Metaphor ....................... 20
  A Review of the English Language Literature
    The First Generation ........................................... 22
    Word Direct from China ...................................... 26
    The Worsley School of Thought ......................... 30
    Up Through the Present ...................................... 32
    Back Through the Millennia ................................. 36

CHAPTER III: DIVORCE OF FIVE ELEMENTS FROM YIN/YANG
  A Review of the English Language Literature ............... 39

CHAPTER IV: A DISCUSSION OF CONSEQUENCES
  Inaccuracy of Correspondences ...................................... 45
  Incomplete Elucidation of Relativity .............................. 46
  Retardation of New Correspondence Development ....... 47
  The Impeding of a Spiritual Re-Contextualization of Oriental Medicine ............... 50

CHAPTER V: A DISCUSSION OF CAUSES
  Preliminary Remarks ..................................................... 53
  Epistemological Challenges to Correspondence Thinking .... 54
  The Quantification of Measure by Quality and Relationship .. 58
  Objectification of Most Phenomena .......................... 60
  Objectification of the Terms Yin and Yang ..................... 61
  Divorce of Yin/Yang Theory from Non-Clinical Phenomena ... 63
  Conclusions About Causes ........................................... 65

CHAPTER VI: CASE FOR A REFORMED FIVE PHASE THEORY
  Elements vs. Phases .................................................... 67
  Five Phases as a Yin/Yang Construct ............................. 70
  The Universality of the Five Phases ............................. 77
  The Relativity of the Five Phases ................................. 80
  Repairing the Foundations of Oriental Medicine Through Linguistic Precision ............... 86
Foundations in Peril

The months immediately preceding the presentation date of this thesis have been notable for the publication of Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine.¹ This is an exceptionally well translated textbook now used in the People’s Republic of China.² As such, it is a clear window into the state of recent Chinese medical thinking. One development this text evidences is the deterioration of the traditional theoretical foundations of Oriental medicine, including the theory of the five elements.³


² Ted J. Kaptchuk, “Introduction, Oriental Medicine, Culture, History and Transformation,” in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, Fundamentals, p. xxxiv.

³ Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, Fundamentals, pp. 11 – 18.
The deterioration seen here is of several kinds and sources. Partly, it is a manifestation of political demand.\(^1\) The five element theory does not conform perfectly to the party line of material dialectics, so it is reported but poorly supported, and criticized instead. But this deterioration has wider parameters and deeper roots. This deterioration can easily be traced back at least to the Western penetration of China\(^2\); and in its current state of usage, there appears to be true concern about the consistency, logic, and therefore the validity of this core theory.

The reluctance in Chinese medical tradition to modify or discard the theories of the past means that theory is encumbered by a considerable and confusing detritus. The theories of yin and yang and the five phases are fraught with defects that should be set out clearly.\(^3\)

Indeed, many defects are then enumerated by the authors in detail not seen before in the English language. They then conclude:

Conspicuous shortcomings are also found in five-phase theory. In some areas the theory has clearly slipped into the metaphysical. . . . Clearly, explaining the functions of the organs in terms of the five phases represents a biased approach. . . . it

---

\(^1\) Kaptchuk, “Introduction,” in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, pp. xxxii - xxxv. Also see Chapter II of this paper: Review of the English Language Literature, Word Direct from China.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. xxxii.

\(^3\) Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, p. 16.
would be biased to regard them as universally valid laws.¹

The text does bring up very real, logical flaws in the theories, or, more precisely, the evolved manner of viewing, describing, and applying the theories. Details of some of the resultant flaws will be discussed further below, but the first point to be made is that Oriental medicine's foundations give the appearance of crumbling - of losing credibility and practical usefulness. This is so in the collective consciousness of the motherland of Oriental medicine; this is so in the most influential of the textbooks used in America.²,³,⁴,⁵,⁶ Could it be possible that such influence would not effect the study, practice and

¹ Ibid., p. 18.


⁴ Note the dearth of five element application in Beijing College of Traditional Medicine, Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine, and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, compilers, *Essentials of Chinese Acupuncture* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1980).


perception of Oriental medicine in most parts of the globe? It is the further contention of this thesis that due to certain linguistic and intellectual errors, as well as national and global trends, it is understandable that these foundations should now be in crisis.

Though this thesis may come to conclusions different from those of three preeminent traditional medical colleges in China, we can agree on the essence of their mandate for theoretical reevaluation:

The errors and insufficiencies of the theory of . . . the five phases in their application to medicine must be clearly identified and eliminated to salvage what is true and useful.²

¹ Similar trends have been reported in contemporary Japan. See Margaret M. Lock, *East Asian Medicine* in Urban Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) p. 197.

² Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, p. 14
Prohibitions and Mandates Relating to this Work

But even if the foundations of Oriental medicine are crumbling, who are we to take on the massive task of rehabilitating that theoretical base? In what sort of position is any child of Western culture to critique the theoretical direction of a medicine with an uninterrupted Oriental lineage of thousands of years? These are not questions reserved for a false, superficial modesty. These questions are asked frequently, and these are questions that bring out strong opinions among Western students, practitioners, and teachers of Oriental medicine. We carry a cultural and neurological heritage that is figuratively and literally a world apart from that which originally produced the theories reconsidered herein. To challenge the way that these theories are currently taught and applied in their mother land is at best an undertaking containing substantial risk.

Yet how can we avoid this work? If we are to put our confidence in Oriental medicine, must we not repeatedly challenge our understanding of its theoretical foundations? Can we avoid responsibility
for shaping a Western interpretation of this system? Certainly, we must study Oriental sources - classic and modern - and appreciate the manner in which these theories and the whole of this system are taught and practiced in China and elsewhere. Yet, can we expect or would we ever want a foreign system to operate here as if the context had not changed, as if the cultural heritage of the present practitioners and patients were Oriental? Is there not a mandate for cultural reinterpretation built into the importation of any such foreign system? ¹

This work involves reinvention that can border on the arrogant. Yet it is work that must at some point be confronted, if this medicine is to belong here, develop, and flourish. It is only with such appreciation of contradiction that this thesis proceeds cautiously with the task at hand.

¹ Kaptchuk, "Introduction," in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, Fundamentals, pp. xvii - xxxvii.
The Importance
of Theoretical Foundations
The materialist, scientific thrust of Western medicine constantly threatens to overpower the more traditional practice of Oriental medicine. Other professions have traveled a similar road. Originally a radical departure from conventional medicine, osteopathy compromised its theoretical purity for acceptance in the political arena. It has changed to the point that in some osteopathic medical schools the distinctly osteopathic curriculum consists of but one 6-week course, and the remainder is identical to that of its former adversaries, the M.D.'s. The chiropractors have lost less of their theoretical identity, but their curriculum's spirit has been greatly influenced in past decades by the conservatism of accrediting bodies. It is not hard to imagine the development of Oriental medicine in America forking in the direction of acquiescence to influences of the Western medical paradigm. This could especially be accelerated when (and if) Oriental medicine practitioners make greater inroads into hospitals, when insurance is mandated on a greater scale for acupuncture (insurance companies only work in the Western medical paradigm), and whenever research money becomes more available to those
trained in Oriental medicine (research money will be paid for answers in terms of Western science, not in terms of traditional Oriental thought).
Development of a Psychology of Oriental Medicine

What we have seen so far of Oriental medicine's acculturation in the West has been a great amount of interest in the non-somatic application of the medicine.\(^1\) It is reported that as a whole, the Chinese have "little skill in identifying emotional states,"\(^2\) and that they "lump together emotions that contemporary Westerners readily differentiate."\(^3\) Furthermore, deep, private feelings of the Chinese are "never shared with anybody, except on special occasions with intimate friends."\(^4\) However, feelings and thoughts of this kind do come up in the course of practice in the West. Western patients lack the reported Oriental taboos against discussing the psychological in the clinical setting. Instead, we treat a culture at times obsessed with the self-conscious analysis of "me." Practitioners' interest in addressing these patient concerns varies, but most will agree that there is a great deal of

\(^1\) Ibid., pp. xix - xxviii.


\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 136.
the psychological coming up in practice that doesn't seem to be addressed in our basic texts.

Modern TCM\(^1\) teaching has valuable insight into the psychological. However, the available literature only covers a small number of conditions.\(^2\),\(^3\),\(^4\) Furthermore, the modern TCM, in its Zang-Fu and energetic pathology focus, does not go particularly far in differentiating emotional/mental/behavioral disorders, lumping most under liver or heart pathology.\(^5\),\(^6\) Of course, this is not incorrect, yet it is limited in its ability to serve as a differential tool for the understanding

---


\(^2\) Beijing College Medicine, Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine, and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, compilers, *Essentials*, p. xii lists only three emotional disorders.

\(^3\) Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, *Acupuncture, A Comprehensive Text*, p.xii lists only three emotional disorders.

\(^4\) C. S. Cheung, Yat Ki Lai, U Aik Kaw, and Howard Harrison, *Mental Dysfunction as treated by Traditional Chinese Medicine* (San Francisco: Traditional Medical Publisher,1981), contents page lists only three emotional disorders.

\(^5\) Kaptchuk, "Introduction," in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, pp. xxv - xxvi.

\(^6\) Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, pp. 204 - 211, and 232 - 242.
of the myriad of psychological complaints that Westerners, especially Americans speak of.

By comparison, a working system focusing much more on the five elements, yin/yang, and the underlying unity of all phenomena could provide two sorts of advantages. Such a system could offer a bit more diversity for differentiation of syndromes. Additionally, this sort of system could interrelate and unify the myriad of psychological manifestations, thus supporting the development of unified spiritual perspectives. The claim has been made that the classics support a view of the five elements as more related to the ten stems than the twelve branches, and therefore more related to the ethereal realm of heaven than the condensed realm of earth.\textsuperscript{1,2} It would appear that according to this distinction, the five elements would be inherently suited to the differentiation of psychological phenomena.

And whether the above pans out to be true, it should at minimum be clear that repeated clarification of the foundational theories of Oriental medicine should be the \textit{sine qua non} for the accurate development of new thinking in the field.


Conflict
Between Western Schools
of Acupuncture

As yet another consideration, we may notice that rivalry, disagreement, and misunderstanding have been produced for years within the American acupuncture community by issues involving the place of five element theory in relation to yin/yang and the eight principles.

The false distinction between 'Eight-Principle acupuncture' and 'Five Element' acupuncture, while indeed false, is a reality in American acupuncture today. Essentially the issue arose because American practitioners reacted in one of two major ways to acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine as evolved in the People's Republic of China during and after the Cultural Revolution. Many, although familiar with Five Elements in the work of Mary Austin and Lawson and Wood, felt attracted to An Outline of Chinese Acupuncture because it came from the People's Republic of China, and thus had to be closer to 'true' acupuncture. This caused those more strongly grounded in the Five Elements to conclude that these other practitioners, and this other acupuncture, were symptomatic and a perversion of the true art of traditional Chinese acupuncture. When the Essentials of Chinese Acupuncture appeared, many in the pro-China camp reacted with joy to this reformulation of The Outline, as it contained valuable information on diagnosis, and especially on the
'Eight Principles' that clarified much for those working from what has now become known as the TCM model.¹

Positive attempts have been made to ameliorate this rift,²,³ and this thesis takes the position that deeper study of all of those theories - with an emphasis on the unity among them - could, over time, serve to create even greater common ground and increase intellectual interaction and other forms of cooperation.


² See ibid, p. 17

Complicating Factors

To make the prospect of continued crumbling of foundations all the more plausible, note that the core repository for Chinese medical philosophy, the People's Republic of China itself, has little interest in this level of philosophy. There is little if any theoretical work of this sort going on, as was the case in past eras. An environment of materialist thought is not conducive to that core level theory that deals with the almost spiritual integration of all phenomena into five, two or one. This part of Oriental philosophy is given lip service in modern Chinese medical teaching, however it is not developed and appreciated as in past dynasties. We could even argue that the acupuncture and herbal medicine practiced currently in China is not traditional Chinese medicine at all.
Medical revivalism in China, as with revivalist movements in general, has not represented the preservation of resurrection of an intact tradition, but rather a reaction to major historical changes that has in turn created something new instead of restoring something old.\footnote{Ralph C. Crozier, "The Ideology of Medical Revivalism in Modern China," \textit{Asian Medical Systems}, A Comparative Study Leslie, Charles, editor. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976) p. 341.}

The history of the revival of a traditional Chinese medicine with weak theoretical foundations is, in fact, even traceable to the period preceding the People's Republic of China. The time after the establishment of the Nationalist Government in 1927 was famous for its attempt to banish traditional medicine in favor of modern Western medicine. However, that same period also spawned a counter movement that bore the seeds of the eventual revival in the 50's. This counter movement already planned ways to soft-sell the theoretical foundations of Oriental medicine.

Probably the most articulate . . . spokesman for this organization and for the reformed Chinese medicine viewpoint in general, was . . . Ch'en Kuo-fu.

. . . Ch'en tried valiantly to explain, or explain away, the traditional medical theories of \textit{Yin-Yang} and the five elements as no more than symbolic terminology for natural physiological processes, but without notable success.\footnote{Ibid., p. 345.}

It can thus be seen that it has been the very flow of history, including the Westernization of China, that has been involved in the problem at hand.
In Japan the reigning political ideology is not Marxist/Leninist, but the overwhelming belief structure is modern science and cosmopolitan medicine. Japanese abandonment of theoretical/cosmological research parallels that in China.¹ In the West, we are essentially abandoned children when it comes to this layer of Oriental medical theory. We have little support for this kind of theory from our parents, the Chinese. The Chinese are distracted by Western medicine and science. Reports circulate widely that many a traditional Chinese practitioner in the People’s Republic of China would choose a Western medical position if they could. These reports are borne out by the Western scientific nature of virtually all the research studies coming out of China and the entire Orient.²

In a sense, we are alone in the West as far as updating and acculturation of five element theory goes. We have the classics and we have each other. The modern Orient’s seeming lack of interest in such theoretical work places the burden of such theoretical renewal squarely on our own shoulders. This thesis is meant to address one small part of the research needed.

¹ Lock, Urban Japan, pp. 195 - 196.

² Note for example that theoretical work of this sort was not the subject of any of the 534 research abstracts in The People’s Medical Publishing House, compilers, Advances in Acupuncture and Acupuncture Anaesthesia, Abstracts of Papers Presented on the National Symposium of Acupuncture, Moxabustion and Acupuncture Anaesthesia, Beijing, June 1-5, 1979 (Beijing: The People’s Medical Publishing House, 1980).
CHAPTER II

OBJECTIFICATION OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS
Overwhelming Dependence on Metaphor

It is one of the contentions of this thesis that the English language literature has represented five element theory with overwhelming dependence on poetic metaphor. This is not universally true, and sources to the contrary will be cited as the case is made in Chapter VI below for a reformed five phase theory that goes clearly beyond metaphor. However, the predominant mode has been to speak of objectified elements (wood, fire, etc.) as metaphor, simile, or analogy in a pseudo-poetic context.
A Review of the English Language Literature
The First Generation

A first major wave of commentaries on acupuncture appeared from 1962 to 1972, consequently having some lasting influence on the expression of practitioners trained well into the 1980's, the time of the next generation of books, discussed hereafter. The earlier generation were all books written for the general public, and they were mostly written by European authors.

The Chinese divided the world into five elements and everything on earth was considered to belong to one or several of these categories. . . . For example, a brick belongs to the element earth; a glass of wine to the elements earth (glass) and water (wine); a barrage balloon to the elements earth (the balloon) and air (helium), a coal fire to earth (coal), air (carbon dioxide and other gases) and fire.¹

The preceding author had significant influence in shaping minds to perceive this theory as a theory about five concrete, static objects or material forms, useful for comparison to simplistically analogous static objects. The following author gives the same, obvious, Western, materially oriented interpretation, and feels it to be so shallow and useless that he fortunately sweeps it under his own rug.

The five elements are: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. They can exist in a helpful and complementary relationship to each other or they can work against one another and so destroy themselves. . . . The Yin-Yang principle and the five elements played an important part in the traditional art of healing, but, because these concepts were handed down in historical documents, their interpretation is difficult and they cannot easily be incorporated into modern medical science.¹

The following reference again speaks of objects. Notice the objectification implied in the term "one another":

. . . the five elements - wood, fire, earth, metal, and water - constitute the guiding principles. These are said to create one another, but also destroy one another . . . ²

Again in 1972, the objectification of the five elements was complete and unquestioned:


In ancient times the Chinese established five basic elements that interact in a creative cycle to form all other substances.\(^1\)

Thus, the preceding source continues the transmission that the five elements are, at root, specific, tangible, static substances or objects.

Also in 1972, the author of the first of the above referenced authors published the supplementary explanation quoted below. Perhaps he did so after encountering resistance or embarrassment to his earlier report that the universe is comprised of five primeval elements.

It should be understood that these terms 'Wood', 'Fire', etc were not used by the Chinese in the actual restrictive sense of the physical wood, fire etc., but rather as implying an archetypal idea, in the sense in which it is used by the psychologist Jung, himself a profound student of Chinese philosophy. For example, the *idea* of the genus house is opposed to the idea of an *actual* house. Before a man can build a house he must have conceived the idea of 'house', whether a bungalow, a skyscraper, a family home for the miner or an old Tudor cottage for the retired business man. The generic idea of 'house' is primary and covers a vast number of possibilities; an actual house built of bricks and mortar etc. is only secondary to the general idea comprising all houses.\(^2\)

Perhaps by allying himself with Jung's concepts, the author may have gained points with some critics otherwise sympathetic to Jung. And it might be noted that this explanation does some service


to the principles of universality articulated in below chapters. However, the characterization of the elements as archetypes used to categorize other objects in the world is still a characterization in the realm of objects - some thing is water-like, or wood-like, etc., and an archetype is a noun, used here to identify an object by association, or metaphor.
Word Direct from China

The previous sources, all from the years 1962 through 1972, were mostly reporting to the West in what often resembled a journalistic mode. To them, the focus of their reporting was significant, yet a bit of a curiosity. A subsequent series of publications in the later seventies and in the eighties were of a different quality. Books like the *Essentials of Chinese Acupuncture*\(^1\) were completely produced in the PRC, translated directly from Chinese sources, or were very responsibly based on current Chinese teaching. Nevertheless, they expressed a similar objectification 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. \(^2\)

Of the above, what is germane to this thesis is the naming of the elements as "materials". Of additional interest is the mandatory reference of the authors to "the material world." This may serve for us

---
\(^1\) Beijing College of Traditional Medicine, Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine, and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Compilers, *Essentials*

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 16.
as a commentary on the adherence of the modern Chinese sources to a materialist dialectic, the national political line for recent decades. Even as a separate chapter below is dedicated to possible causes for the observed objectification of the five elements, it is convenient here to notice the possible existence of political pressure for traditional medical theory to conform to current state ideology.¹

A dictionary of medical terms coming out of Beijing five years after the appearance of *Essentials* defined five elements in the following fashion:

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 organs²

Note that this source also makes the mandatory reference to "the physical universe",³ much the same way *Essentials* speaks of "the material world".⁴ This book was the work of nine listed authors and two listed editors; perhaps we can infer from the duality of expression

---

¹ Kaptchuk, "Introduction," in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, pp. xxxii - xxxv.


³ Ibid.

⁴ Beijing College of Traditional Medicine, Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine, and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Compilers, *Essentials*, p. 16.
in this definition that the eleven contributors were divided along lines of objective and process-oriented interpretations of the five elements. Perhaps the modern Chinese interpretation is not uniform, but the objectification of the five elements is nevertheless a major current.

The Essentials may be lauded for clarity on one part of their discussion of five element theory. Continuing their criticism-laden chapter on the subject, they state:

Similes and allegories are used to explain the complicated links between man and the natural environment.¹

While the above quotation could be read in different ways, it is easily arguable that it should be read as an uncomfortable apology in the face of a more complicated and superior Western medicine. Seen in that context, this would appear as a less mystical and a more matter-of-fact description than those in the preceding sources cited. It would seem evident that the five elements have, indeed, totally become similes, allegories or metaphors. While seeking to apologize for their national medicine, the authors of The Essentials have done us a service and by accurately describing the five elements for what they really are.

It is in the use of metaphor that one can see the genesis of the current thinking on the five elements. In general terms, metaphor and simile can be valuable, powerful tools for teaching some principles. However, their overuse can lead a student to dwell on, institutionalize, or objectify the metaphoric image and loose touch with the conceptual substrata the metaphor is alluding to. This is par-

¹ Ibid., p. 17.
particularly true if such pseudo-poetic teaching methods are used almost exclusively for millennia.
The Worsley School of Thought

The mere mention of the term metaphor in this context brings to mind the Worsley school of five element theory. The untiring work of J. R. Worsley has over decades been the cornerstone of an inspiring and influential renaissance of correspondence thinking. The investigation he and his students have initiated has been a very valuable contribution to the adaptation of Chinese medicine to Western needs. It could well be posited that Western patients and practitioners need re-application of the five elements to psychological phenomena; the Worsley school’s thinking begins that process.

The Worsley work has been sensitive, insightful, and downright poetic. In this strength lies one potential limitation. The explanatory structure of the Worsley approach is very metaphor dependant, thus leading again to an objectification of the elements.

The quality of the Earth element is that of the mother - mother earth, the caring, loving provider. The same provider as the human mother providing for her child, with food and love and warmth for the mind, body and spirit.

The element Metal is like the autumn. As the trees let go of the leaves when the work is done for the year, so there is a need within to discard what has been finished with and to let go of labours until
the next spring time, or the next new beginning. It is
the element which is responsible within for the removal
of poisons and toxins, and the waste matter that needs
to be discarded. It is also the element concerned with
quality itself. As the Earth element is the mother, the
Metal element is the father.¹

To reiterate, it is not the purpose of this thesis to negate the
above. Worsley’s statement is wise and eloquent; the metaphor works;
and it is yet another illustration of the overwhelming use of metaphor in
the teaching of the five elements.

Students of Worsley may at times even deny the
metaphoric/allegorical quality of these comparisons.

Chinese expression often sounds poetical and
allegorical giving the impression of a beautiful system
that smacks of unreality, or at least quite removed from
life as we know it. Yet, . . . Each Element . . . (is) as real
as the words on this page, as real as the presence of the
earth beneath our feet.²

¹ J. R. Worsley, *Is Acupuncture for You?* (U.S.A.: 1973 [city and
publisher not specified]; revised ed., Longmead, G.B.: Element Books Ltd.,
1985

² Dianne M. Connelly, *Traditional Acupuncture: The Law of the Five
Elements* (Columbia, Maryland: The Center for Traditional Acupuncture,
Up Through the Present

To one degree or another, the objectification of the five elements continued through the eighties. Some European sources continue with strongly objectifying language.

The first element to form was Water (equated with hydrogen), then came the formation of Fire as its opposite. From compression of the Fire energy came the formation of Wood (activity) and from this activity came form and Metal. From Metal (the element which cools Fire) came Earth, and Earth produced 'the myriad beings, who carry Yin on their backs and embrace Yang'.

A scholarly work published in 1983 is astute enough to accurately relate the translation of Xing as "passage" instead of element, yet it simultaneously offers this materially oriented summary of the theory:

---


They (the five elements) are the basic materials of life which were meant to have been generated by the two cosmic forces. . .\textsuperscript{1}

Yet another source during this period was commendable for the richness of its multi-layered insight and its scholarly basis in the classics. Nevertheless, it fails to go beyond the paradigm of elements as substances or objects.

. . . the "five winds" are thought to generate the Elements, which in turn generated the tastes and then the organs, occurring in a chain from the less materialized Heavenly influences to the more materialized Earthly influences and finally to the Yin organs themselves.

Taking the passages together we may see how the Elements are themselves generated by this interaction.\textsuperscript{2}

Phrases such as "the Elements themselves"\textsuperscript{3} demonstrate this source's distinct adherence to the point of view of the elements as substances. Similarly, in two charts in the same chapter, the authors show source chi going to or producing the source points, the yin organs, the five elements, and the ten stems.\textsuperscript{4} From this it seems that the five elements are being described as objects or at least entities like the organs or points.

The authors come close to a different interpretation while translating a passage from the classics in which a term translatable as "quality" is used in reference to the five elements. The translation

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{2} Matsumoto and Birch, \textit{Five Elements}, p. 20 - 21.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., pp. 15-16
could have been a clear opportunity for the authors to posit a less object oriented thesis of five elements, but the authors fail to put more than one foot into this new territory:

Here, the term "quality" also has the meaning "a substance of quality" or the "quality of a substance" and is translated as "substance" by some authors.¹

Finally, these authors, who take stands on many other interpretations/speculations in their fine work, fail to take a stand on the mechanism behind the metaphors and classic correspondences of the five elements:

If we ask the question "What are the Five Elements?" We pose for ourselves what is probably an unresolvable dilemma . . .²

. . . we cannot definitively answer the question "What are the Five Elements," . . .³

There have been breakthroughs in the published thinking about this core theory, and those intellectual breakthroughs will be cited later as the case is made for a fully process-oriented (as opposed to an object-oriented) view of five phases. Nonetheless, even most of those texts contributing to this breakthrough still drift into objectification:

---
¹ Ibid., p. 21
² Ibid., p. 19
³ Ibid., p. 26
For example, wood is normally kept in check by metal, but if it becomes too strong it will rebel against metal. Powerless to withstand the attack, metal will succumb.¹

¹ Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, p. 11.
Back Through the Millennia

The preceding review of English language literature should not create the suggestion that the problem of objectification is exclusively modern or entirely cultural. The following criticism of the five element logic seizes upon the objectification mode of thinking in order to poke holes in the standard theory:

Quite apart (from any cycle) Fire naturally melts Metal, if there is enough Fire. Or Metal may pulverize a burning Fire into cinders, if there is enough Metal. Metal will store Water (but cannot produce it). Fire attaches itself to Wood (but is not produced from it).¹

This reference is notable because it is another illustration of the gross objectification of the five elements, because it is a reason-

ably successful criticism based on the flaw of objectification, and, most interestingly, because it is a reference from the fourth century B.C.

Similarly, a source widely considered dependable for accuracy of translation and scholarly insight into the classics gives us this evidence of historical deviation of terminology towards an objectivist point of view.

The categorization of numerous natural phenomena and abstract concepts in five separate lines of correspondences was designated with the term wu-hsing, translated here as "Five Phases" to reflect the dynamic notion inherent in the Chinese term hsing(literally "to proceed). Although the translation of wu-hsing as "Five Elements" ought to be avoided in general, it should be pointed out that ancient Chinese sources do indeed refer to water, fire, metal, wood, and soil as substantial necessities of the human environment, adding grain as a sixth "element." Thus, the Tso-chuan stated: "Heaven created the Five Materials (wu-ts'ai); the people use them all. To eliminate but one would not be possible."¹

It turns out that the error of objectification is not new, and not limited to the West. Apparently what we are dealing with - or recreating - is a debate between tendencies of thought that have been interwoven throughout the history of Chinese medicine. This thesis takes the position that once more, as previously in our long tradition, we must rectify the recurring error of seeing the five elements as materials or objects.

CHAPTER III

DIVORCE
OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS
FROM YIN/YANG
A corollary of the objectification of the five elements has been the ideological separation of the theory from yin/yang. In short, it makes some visible sense that when the five elements are seen as frozen objects or substances, and not strictly as phases of transformation, then they would easily lose their common identity with the binary system for charting transformation, of which they are an elaboration.

The earlier wave of English language commentary on acupuncture was far from seeing that total common identity.

The interplay of the creative and destructive forces in the five elements is, to the Chinese, another as part of the delicate balance of all life in the polarity of Yin and Yang, which has been mentioned earlier.¹

The above vague passage is the author's only head-on confrontation with the connection of yin/yang to the five elements, and that is out of twenty-four pages on the subject of five elements. He

---

¹ Mann, *Ancient Chinese Art*, p. 80.
does add the following comments later on:

. . . We have already seen that the basis of Chinese traditional medicine is the polarity of Yin and Yang, the negative and positive, in addition to which is the division of the body in accordance with the twelve primary organs and meridians. But, forming a bridge between these two groups, is a third: that of the five elements.

Six of the twelve organs and meridians are Yin, six are Yang, and each of the five elements controls one Yin organ and meridian and one Yang, except the element 'fire', which in both groups controls two.¹

It should be seen from the content of the above quote that the connection seen is only a partial and contrived link via the pre-assigned polarities of the organs and meridians.

Similarly, the author quoted below goes through 237 pages and considerable comment on the five elements while only giving the following transparently inadequate explanation of the link with yin and yang.

The Yiin-Yang principle and the five elements are closely associated. The Yang energy can be strengthened, but also weakened by the five elements, and the same applies to the Yin. . . a Yin and a Yang organ belong, as we shall see later, to each element. . .

For the sake of completeness we should also note that the Yiin-Yang principle and the five elements are also associated with the times of the day and the cyclic signs of the Chinese lunar calendar, as a result of which a connection was assumed between illness and cosmic forces.²

---

¹ Ibid., p. 93.

² Palos, *Chinese Art*, p. 31.
The following Western commentator sees the relationship between yin/yang and the five elements as being about as comprehensible as the creation story of the bible, and he expresses an opinion of Chinese intellect as a result:

The Chinese theory of the universe taught that Yin and Yang produced the Five Elements, and from them all matter was fashioned. The Chinese mind - unflawed by logical processes - reasoned that the human body was no exception, and the elements must have their parallels in the human anatomy.¹

The ubiquitous Essentials only drops this hint at the end of the section on yin/yang and five elements:

In clinical application the two are usually related with and supplement each other and cannot be entirely separated.²

Of course, we are left hanging as to the meaning of this passing comment; is it a casual understatement of a highly valued connection? Or is the connection but a technique for using both clinically in a parallel fashion? Certainly, given the meager amount of copy dedicated to the connection, we can conclude that reflection on the connection was not a priority for the authors.

Some of the more recent sources have used rather creative logic in trying to link the five elements with yin & yang. One source cites modern quantum physicists who compare the Chinese concept of


² Beijing College of Traditional Medicine, Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine, and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Compilers, Essentials, p. 21.
chi to the modern corpuscular theory of light in which light (like chi) is considered matter plus energy. Then this author makes a leap:

The Five Phases, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water (sometimes called the Five Elements) were actually sub-classifications of Yin and Yang. They were the microscopic or material components of this principle.

This was an interesting example from the perspective of this thesis. It seemed promising that the above source saw five phases as unified with yin/yang, but the argument turned out to be but a high tech objectification of the five elements.

Another publication very recently started off on a promising note. It began its text by at least implying a conceptual unity between yin/yang and the five elements. However, the conclusion of that first chapter left something to be desired.

... the Five Phases are energetic movements with definite cycles, while the Eight Criteria are the constants that must be assessed in whatever Phase we are investigating.

And while the above described clinical evaluation scenario may be real for this and other practitioners, and while this scenario may be one seemingly expedient way to use five elements and eight principles simultaneously, it is ideologically flawed. The eight principles are but an expansion of yin/yang comparison thinking, and


2 Seem, Acupuncture Energetics, p. 20.
yin/yang has historically been seen as a cyclic concept.\textsuperscript{1,2} Thus, even this relatively enlightened text reaches a bizarre and arbitrary conclusion; five elements are still positioned as divorced from yin/yang.

Perhaps most distressing is the fact that many sources teaching five elements totally fail to describe any link of the theory to yin/yang.\textsuperscript{3,4,5,6,7,8} The ideological separation of the theories is not universal, as several sources have stood ground on the issue, as shall be revealed in the last chapter. But, as the above references may illustrate, the problem has been very widespread and influential.

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Wallnofer and Von Rottauscher, Chinese Folk Medicine
  \item Manaka and Urquhart, Layman’s Guide.
  \item Mann, Cure of Many Diseases.
  \item Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Acupuncture, A Comprehensive Text.
  \item Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, Fundamentals.
  \item Hiller and Jewell, Health Care.
\end{enumerate}
CHAPTER IV

A DISCUSSION

OF

CONSEQUENCES
Inaccuracy of Correspondences

First of all, objectification of the five elements can spawn inaccuracy of thinking and inaccuracy of correspondences. If the attention of students and all those applying five elements is exclusively upon an elemental object rather than the underlying process, then correspondences could be made in error. Unclear premises will yield incorrect conclusions.
Incomplete Elucidation of Relativity

It is the contention of this thesis that the elements are not fixed objects but metaphoric names for portions of any defined process. Depending upon the process or segment of the process being analyzed, the phase assignments could look different. To use briefer terminology to express this principle, it could be said that the five elements (phases) are relative references, not fixed references.

Thus the correspondence of any part of a process to the five element or five phase description mechanism depends on the relative position of that part to the process, and not on the emblematic appearance of archetypal material images. Teaching of the five elements in an overwhelmingly metaphoric fashion could easily have the consequence of narrow over-attention to the material images of the elements and incomplete elucidation of the relative quality of assignments.
Retardation of New Correspondence Development

It is widely accepted that the five element concept is applicable in a universal range.\(^1\),\(^2\) It can be applied to the analysis of phenomena as different as sounds and colors. Yet, modern understanding of many of the classical correspondences is dim at best. Objectification and the replacement of rationale with layers of dense metaphor have left the five element correspondences in the realm of scriptural revelation. That which is objectified is made less universally applicable. That which is identified too exclusively by one physical object, no matter how common or basic that object, is going to be bound and limited by the physical identity of that object.

There is a recurrent call heard amongst American acupuncturists for greater adaptation of Oriental diagnosis to the Western perceptions of psychology. As mentioned in Chapter I above, five element theory is in some ways inherently suited for the task. However, little of any concentrated, comprehensive speculation on the matter is

---


forthcoming. Could one reason be that the transmission of the five element method has been obscured by the metaphor-bound teaching method? Has the pseudo-poetic teaching of the five elements led to intellectual stagnation? There may certainly be other factors, but it is the contention of this thesis that such objectification has stunted the development of new five element correspondences.

Evidence has been given above for the divorce of the five element theory from yin/yang theory. More unified teaching of these two constructs could yield a new generation of five element thinking, giving those utilizing the five element theory another layer of understanding useful in coming up with new correspondences unique to our needs. Stated conversely, current thinking in the field, by missing the richness of the connection between five elements and yin/yang, has provided incomplete support for the development of new five element correspondences.

There is yet a third point of view on this matter. Seldom is any rational standard offered for the mechanism of applying five element thinking to the unique observations of the Western eye and the cognitions of the Western mind. Granted, the metaphor-based explanation is a developed construct; however, it is laden with the limitations described throughout this thesis. It is an explanation in a poetic context, not a rational context - it isn't bad, it's just limited. An explanation in a rational context will also have it's limitations, and will get similar, complementary value from explanation in a poetic context.
And explanations in rational contexts are appearing.\textsuperscript{1,2,3,4} The next chapter reviews these breakthroughs, acknowledges them for their contribution, and notes that the descriptions are for the most part brief or incomplete. Overall, there is incomplete support in the literature for development of new five element correspondences, and that is plausibly a consequence of the objectification of the five elements and the divorce of the five elements from yin/yang.

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{2} Porkert, \textit{Theoretical Foundations}, pp. 43 - 50.

\textsuperscript{3} Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, \textit{Acupuncture, A Comprehensive Text}, pp. 5 - 6.

\textsuperscript{4} Kaptchuk, \textit{Web}, pp. 343 - 344.
\end{flushleft}
The Impeding of a Spiritual Re-Contextualization of Oriental Medicine

Whole schools of thought in Oriental medical history have understood and expressed yin/yang, five elements, and traditional medicine in a spiritual context. Some of these lines of thinking have survived and are represented in current English language literature.¹

The following might be one simplistic way to see what sort of ideological environment supports a spiritual perspective. When the intellectual activity in some sphere is focused on many fragments of knowledge, analyzing concepts apart into finer and finer fragments, the consciousness of the analyzers becomes one devoid of unity. The world view created is more a material view, full of the superficial diversity and separateness of the material world.

When the same intellectual activity is channeled into a focus on ideology that brings together diverse fragments, a more inclusive consciousness is generated. The idea of consolidating all phenomena into the five phased process model is a massive step towards such

¹ Note for example, the works of Ni, Hua Ching and Michio Kushi below in the section on Sources Consulted.
unification. The linking of this five fold process to an underlying two phased process is an organic next step, and that process of seeing all phenomena as two is but a small step from seeing all phenomena as one.

The overwhelming objectification of the five elements clearly impedes the re-creation of such a spiritual context; the focus on elements as material forms has proven to be inspiring to some, but as discussed above, without an accompanying method of rational explanation, it has been a diversion or source of misinformation for others. Similarly, the presentation of the five elements as separate from or only remotely related to yin/yang has been of similar disservice to Oriental medicine. The divorce of those two theories has consequently been an impediment to the development of spiritual consciousness.
CHAPTER V

A DISCUSSION

OF

CAUSES
Preliminary Remarks

Although above sections have begun the work of this chapter, it is here that we systematically ask the question "why?" Why has this objectification (and the corollary divorce from yin/yang) come about? It is worth acknowledging that this section is the most speculative of all parts of this thesis; as we go deeper into this question by seeking causes or less clearly causal associated factors, we are exploring the outer reaches of the subject at hand. Nevertheless, it was decided to include such discussion for it is thought provoking, it deepens the study of the issue, and it opens directions for related study.
Epistemological Challenges to Correspondence Thinking

Some causes and associated factors have already been described above. For example, Chapters I and II include discussions of the objectifying nature of the current Chinese political environment, and the trend towards understatement of theoretical principles during the Nationalist period. However, these two very real factors can be subsumed under a broader, more inclusive understanding of all that the five element theory has been up against over time.

In the history of medicine in China, two basic paradigms appear to have provided the entirety of all therapy systems with a durable core. These two paradigms, known in other cultures as well, are (1) the paradigm of cause-and-effect relations between corresponding phenomena, and (2) the paradigm of cause-and-effect relations between noncorresponding phenomena.

The former is based on a recognition that visible or abstract phenomena may be manifestations of a varying number of underlying principles. Phenomena that are manifestations of one and the same principle correspond to one another; that is to say, any change to which one particular phenomena is subjected will also affect any corresponding phenomenon that shares the underlying principle. . .
The second paradigm, that is, the paradigm of cause-and-effect relations between noncorresponding phenomena, is based on the observation that phenomena, be they tangible or not, coexist independently and that they may, under specific conditions, exert influences upon one another that may be of a harmful or beneficial nature. Thus, men and spirits share one environment; they are separate phenomena in their own rights without any intrinsic relationship. Under certain conditions the spirits may harm the humans, and vice versa. Similarly, humans may be in relationship with many other phenomena, be they wind, moisture, food, or germs. The point is that these relationships are simply temporary, recurrent, or permanent encounters between individual phenomena and that the sum of these phenomena constitutes the sum of the universe. Consequently, the paradigm of cause-and-effect relations between noncorresponding phenomena contains a stimulus to identify and, if possible, measure ever more specific relations between individual phenomena, and because of this may support an analytic world view; efforts to explain the position of a phenomena in an all-embracing system of correspondences may foster a more holistic, organic perspective.¹

To summarize the above insight more simply, Chinese medical thought has always worked on one of two opposing paradigms. The first was a more holistic, organic, unifying paradigm; yin/yang and five element thinking are the most known survivors of this paradigm. The other paradigm held that things are separate and unrelated; this paradigm included belief in causation by ancestors, spirits, heat, cold, moisture, subtle matter, germs, and more.²

¹ Unschuld, History of Ideas., pp. 5 - 6.
² Ibid., p. 7.
Thus it appears that analytic thinking has historically been a source of competition for unifying correspondence thinking. Perhaps we can speculate that the tendency to split and separate in one's thinking is a recurrent human trait, systematically traceable in the history of thought.

The same author shows that through the ages, correspondence thinking had no problem holding its own, despite some competition from within the same culture.\(^1\) However, it has already been mentioned above that the introduction of Western influence has proven a strong factor in the recent deterioration of correspondence thinking. This is significant, new competition. Of course, China has seen competition from other invading cultures, yet the results of Western contact now suggest a notably greater influence, especially in medicine and science. The worldwide mushrooming of Western scientific medicine, industrialization's support of technology, and breakthroughs in world-wide intercommunication have conspired to seriously tip the scales against correspondence thinking, thus truly endangering this foundation of Oriental medicine.

Before departing this discussion of historical forces, it could be considered that current TCM, in its analysis of the causes of disease, emphasizes the paradigm of cause-and-effect by noncorresponding phenomena, like wind, heat, dampness, germs, parasites, etc. The most intriguing feature of this observation is that TCM is thus more aligned philosophically with Western medicine than with the medicine of systemic correspondence; in this light, the marriage of

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 57-58.
modern TCM with Western medicine, and TCM's rejection of the five elements come in to perspective.
The Quantification of Measure by Quality and Relationship

In the rest of this chapter we will essentially be filling in the analysis of why and how the above historical forces may have been supported by faulty thinking, teaching, language, etc.

One such factor worth understanding is the way that the drive for quantification may have contributed to objectification. Note first that quantification and measurement is a hallmark of the aforementioned paradigm of cause-and-effect by noncorresponding phenomena\(^1\) in general, and of Western medicine and science in particular. That this paradigm and this type of science have influenced Chinese medicine is documented above. Therefore, we can assert that a drive to measure and quantify has been a part of the line of thought that has pervaded Chinese medicine for a few centuries. What is worth noting by itself, apart from the factual historical considerations above, is that such quantification has been in conflict with Chinese medicine's reported focus on quality and/or relationship.\(^2\) The epistemology of sys-

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 6.

\(^2\) East Asian Medical Studies Society, "Translators' Foreward," in Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing College of Chinese Medicine, and Shanghai College of Chinese Medicine, *Fundamentals*, pp. ii - iii.
temic correspondence is particularly tied to this emphasis on the appreciation of a phenomenon's quality and its description according to its relative position in the scheme of things.

The contradiction between the historical paradigms described in the section above may thus be seen as paralleled by the contradiction between the drives for quantification and qualification. Particularly with time and the development of impressive technology for precise measurement in scientific and medical arenas, quantification has found an edge in its long interaction with qualification.

An emphasis on measurement of quantity can be linked to an exclusively material view and a tendency toward objectification. Modern Western science is of no use in measuring non-objective phenomena, and it has no place in such matters as five element correspondence thinking. The decline of the system of knowing primarily by relationship and quality has been a contributing part of the objectification of the five elements, or at least a notable associated factor.
Objectification of Most Phenomena

Perhaps the next point may be seen by some as self-evident in view of the above arguments. However, in the interest of completeness, it is offered here in simple form.

The theme of this thesis is the objectification of the five elements. However, it may well be that humanity may have experienced a trend toward greater objectification of all reality.\(^1\) It is commonly said that our world has long been drifting towards materialism and away from a spiritual perception of the world. Religions still serve as an ostensible balancing agent in some cultures, yet daily life seems to steer so many of our planet’s citizens into consumerism or other materially oriented ways of life.

If the above critique of our planetary direction is true, is it no wonder that the energetic quality of five element thinking has been displaced by a materialist quality of five element objectification?

\(^1\) Michio Kushi, East West Foundation/Kushi Institute, Boston and Brookline, Massachusetts. Lectures and Interviews, 1972-1986.
Objectification of the Terms Yin and Yang

Another factor associated with the developments described in this thesis is an objectification of the terms yin and yang. It is argued elsewhere that in their purest sense, the terms yin and yang were meant to be adjectival modifiers used to describe one of two relative phases of transformation. The terms have long fallen into use as nouns (objects/substances/entities unto themselves), and unusual pronoun-like adjectives-without-nouns.\(^1\) As the terminology has changed, so has the implied meaning, and its understanding. Yin and yang have become less oriented to process, and have been objectified.

If yin and yang are seen too often as objects, it is no mystery how other objects (wood, fire, earth, etc.) are seen as distinct; hence, the divorce of the five elements from yin/yang, as described above.

If there is no vivid linking of the five elements and yin/yang, then there is less chance for the perception of the five elements as expanded descriptors of the yin/yang transformation. In summary, the objectification of yin/yang has contributed to the schism between the

five element theory and yin/yang theory, and that schism has contributed to objectification of the five elements.
Divorce of Yin/Yang Theory from Non-Clinical Phenomena

There are movements afoot to apply yin/yang correspondence thinking to many fields, from modern science to mundane daily life.\textsuperscript{1,2,3,4,5,6} Aside from these movements, the English language literature generally at least acknowledges the universality of yin/yang theory.\textsuperscript{7} Nevertheless, yin/yang correspondence thinking is not applied universally in the literature overall and throughout the

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
    \item Kushi, Lectures and Interviews.
    \item Michio Kushi, \textit{Acupuncture, Ancient and Future Worlds}. (Boston: Tao Publications, 1974).
    \item Michio Kushi, "Michio Kushi Discusses Yin Yang." \textit{The Order of the Universe}, 5(1): 1-5
    \item Saul Miller with JoAnne Miller, \textit{Food for Thought, A New Look at Food and Behavior} (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979).
    \item Porkert, \textit{Theoretical Foundations}, p. 31.
\end{enumerate}
The words yin and yang are used frequently in the technical terminology of TCM to name disease entities understood in a narrow clinical sense (i.e.- yin deficiency, rising yang of the liver, etc.). But yin and yang thinking is not used widely as a primary problem solving modality, especially if the problem at hand includes phenomena other than the tongues and pulses clinicians (technicians?) are used to analyzing. Students and even practitioners are at a loss when asked to discuss the yin/yang qualities of modern, non-clinical phenomena like politics, air travel, or thesis writing. In a sense, yin/yang theory has become divorced from everything, short of a very limited, specialized application in medicine.

If yin/yang theory has become so divorced from most all phenomena, is it difficult to understand why it has become divorced from the five elements theory?

---

1 Skardis, "Contemporary Issues."
Conclusions About Causes

It should be seen from the above possibilities that the objectification of the five elements (and consequently, their divorce from yin/yang theory) are part of a dense pattern of historical, cultural, and intellectual realities. If nothing else, this above discussion should be indicative of the depth of the problem, as well as the need for a strong and explicit reform.
CHAPTER VI

THE CASE

FOR A REFORMED

FIVE PHASE THEORY
Elements vs. Phases

Several major sources have now cast their lot with the basic contention that the term five elements is a mis-translation.

The categorization of numerous natural phenomena and abstract concepts in five separate lines of correspondence was designated with the term wu-hsing, translated here as "Five Phases" to reflect the dynamic notion inherent in the Chinese term hsing (literally "to proceed"). . . . the translation of wu-hsing as "Five Elements" ought to be avoided . . .1

The use of the word element has been criticized as being a rather static concept. The translation of Xing is literally 'passage' and it is thought that the Wu Xing are best conceived of as 'five phases of change' . . .2

Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, European missionaries aroused interest in and furthered understanding of Chinese culture by alluding, whenever feasible, to familiar notions and concept. Because of limitations of their philological resources they rendered wu-hsing by "Five Elements." That this translation is erroneous and misleading has been pointed out by such scholars as Granet and Needham. It is to be regretted that Needham adduces historical habit to justify contin-

---

1 Unschuld, History of Ideas. p.58.
2 Hiller and Jewell, Health Care, p. 227.
ued use of the traditional equivalent, encouraging its perpetuation by authors who will not warn their readers, as he has done. *Hsing* literally means "passage" (or in the active sense, "passing through"); thus in Latin we use the normative equivalent *transvectus*, and in English "evolutive phase."¹

Due to this scholarly work cited, the term "phase" has been used in a few other publications. Interestingly, even some of these publications otherwise did not fully appreciate or apply the implied linguistic mandate. As just one example, the following source comes to similar linguistic conclusions, yet fails to implement them by sustaining the use of the static term five elements throughout the remainder of the book in question.

The Chinese character we translate as "Elements" is sometimes rendered as "phases" or "movements." In the ancient writings it meant "crossroads." This more literal meaning had the symbolic advantage of implying the energetic coordinates of a larger cosmological system.²

Similarly, the following very recent source uses the term element in all but one instance, explaining the interjection of the one usage of the term phase with the following scant, inadequate footnote:

In Chinese medicine, the five elements are better expressed as five phases. This term expresses the concepts of motion and change in time that is inherent in these five categories. Nonetheless, both terms are used commonly.³


Several other excellent translations have been offered: "the five transformational stages,"¹ "Five Stages of Physical and Mental Transformation,"² "five transformations,"³ "the Five Transformations Theory."⁴ The term phase may suggest a process through time even more than the term transformation, and what this thesis calls for is a change to the consistent use of the term the five phases.

¹ Kushi, Book of Macrobiotics., p. 134.
² Ibid., p. 135.
³ Kushi, Acupuncture Requena, p.15.
⁴ Tara, Human Behavior, p. 66.
Five Phases as a Yin/Yang Construct

While there are a number of sources agreeing to translation into a process-oriented terminology like five phases, the field of collaborating sources dwindles as we look into the relationship of the five phases to yin/yang theory. As stated in the above chapter on The Divorce of the Five Elements from Yin/Yang Theory, a sizable amount of sources give lip service to the link between the two constructs. However, many of these acknowledgements prove to be without explanation, or with shallow or erroneous explanation. There are very few sources that have expressed a logical, non-metaphoric mechanism for the five phase dynamic, and even fewer that have seen this as an explicitly yin/yang dynamic. A few that meet both criteria are quoted below, starting with this 1974 reference:
The Five Evolutive Phases, as their name implies, constitute stretches of time, temporal segments of exactly defined qualities that succeed each other in cyclical order at reference positions defined in space. . . .\(^1\)

Wood corresponds to potential activity, to minor yang . . .
Fire corresponds to actual activity, to major yang . . .
Metal corresponds to actual structivity, to minor yin . . .
Water corresponds to actual structivity, to major yin . . .\(^2\)
The center of these four peripheral evolutive phases is marked by the central E.P., Earth. . . .\(^3\)

In the ancient sections of the *Nei Ching*, compiled at a time when yin/yang outshone the other polarities in the minds of the authors, the central evolutive phase is inserted at one single point, between Fire(major yang, actual activity) and Metal (minor yin, potential structivity). Because of the influence of the classical tradition that has remained to this day the most frequent technical sequence.\(^4, 5\)

\(^1\) Porkert, *Theoretical Foundations*, p. 45.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 49.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 50.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 51

\(^5\) It is this sequence that this thesis leans towards. In contrast, the *Nei-ching* chapters authored in later eras presented a pattern with the earth phase diagrammatically appearing in the center and dynamically appearing after each peripheral phase. The conceivable advantage of this latter configuration is its tighter, more obvious fit into a yin/yang pattern; with an even number of (peripheral) phases, two can be yin and two can be yang; the remainder, the earth phase, might as well be given an unusual role so as to keep the four peripheral phases in a more defensible even numbered four, divisible by 2 (yin/yang). It seems quite imaginable that this pattern was invented to keep lesser intellects from missing the
The 1976 reference that follows below expresses a bit more. It also affirms the yin/yang quality inherent in the five part arrangement, while also giving a description of the qualitative directionality involved in these phases. Although a few correspondences are mentioned for quasi-metaphoric value, the main thrust of this pivotal passage is to provide a rational, yin/yang mechanism for the transformation taking place in the five tiered pattern.

1. This slightly yang Phase is slightly yinnizing. Warmth and activity begin to evidence upward movement. Therefore it is the time of waking up or being born.

2. This very yang Phase is very yinnizing. Greatest heat and activity evidence outward expansion. Therefore, it is the time of extensive growth.

3. This central Phase is the Phase of relative balance between heat and cold, upward and downward movement, activity and inactivity, expansion and contraction. Therefore, it is the time of transformation within transformation.

4. This slightly yin Phase is slightly yangizing. Coolness and inactivity begin to evidence downward

common identity between five phases and yin/yang theory. The position of this thesis is that this material can effectively be taught without contortions. Furthermore, such manipulation is counter productive; it lessens the simplicity of five evenly flowing phases, inserting instead a less than organic stutterstepping of brief, re-appearing earth phases. That configuration with earth at the center has its value in illustrating the point that there is a unique quality at the changeover from one phase to another, but there are many interesting little points to be made about the course of change. This thesis chooses to emphasize the relatively seamless nature of the process, and the unity therein, both qualities that ultimately serve to clarify the yin/yang pattern implicit in five phases. Therefore the earlier Nei-ching configuration is highlighted in this thesis.
movement. Therefore, it is the time of falling and harvesting.

5. This very yin Phase is very yangizing. Greatest cold and inactivity evidence inward contraction. Therefore, it is the time of pooling, storage, hibernation, and decay.¹

The following is a cite from 1981, matched almost word for word in another publication in 1983. It is an all too brief and passing explanation that is nevertheless laudable for its intention to see the logical mechanism of transformation behind the metaphor. To avoid any confusion with the preceding examples, note that the authors speak to the five phase configuration with earth diagrammatically at the center and dynamically between each other phase. A commonality with yin/yang theory is not mentioned here and is later spoken of as somewhat incongruous with five phases,² yet it does not take a sinologist to see yin/yang qualities in the descriptions given.

Wood is associated with active functions that are in a phase of growing or increasing. Fire represents functions that have reached a maximal state, and are about to begin to decline. Metal symbolizes functions that are declining, and Water represents these functions that have actually reached a maximal state of decline, and are about to change in the direction of growth. Finally, Earth designates balance or neutrality.³,⁴


² Kaptchuk, Web, p. 346.

³ Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, Acupuncture, A Comprehensive Text, p. 6.

⁴ This quote appears in near-verbatim form in Kaptchuk, Web, pp. 344. A footnote on p. 343 acknowledges that “This appendix was written in collaboration with Dan Bensky and the assistance of Kiilko Matsumoto.”
Finally, in 1984, this source gives the following lucid overview:

As stated before, yin and yang are a continuous process of contraction and expansion. Within this process are various stages of development, one leading to the next. The Five Transformation Theory is an attempt to describe the general energetic qualities that exist within this process. The five stages should be seen then not as totally individual phenomena, but as a sequence of events that moves in a continuing cycle.¹

It is possible to bring together the views expressed in the preceding sources, as well as other sources, in order to bring out more phase associations that elaborate a mechanically visualizable, unified dynamic. Most of these associations are primary descriptors of yin or yang, and thus they express the complete unity of the five phase theory with the yin/yang theory.

Phase one has been historically referred to as the wood phase. Wood here is a descriptive metaphor for the first predominantly active phase in any process. This phase is thus associated with the beginning of any process, a time in which motion and therefore expansion are beginning to be predominant. At this point the expansive motion goes in all directions, but has a tendency to primarily be funnelled upward. Energy in this phase is beginning to be in a replete state. Sprouting and growth are other common associations of such a phase.

Phase two has been historically referred to as the fire phase. Fire here is a descriptive metaphor for that phase of any process in which expansive activity reaches its maximum. The expansive activity in question includes a sizable amount of ascending activity, as in the

¹ Tara, Human Behavior, p. 67.
preceding phase, but now the expansion is greater, in balance, and is generally multi-directional. There is a peaking or climaxing of expansive activity associated with this phase. Energy in this phase is in a definite state of repletion, relative to any of the other phases of this particular process. Warmth and light are other common associations of this phase.

Phase three has been historically referred to as the earth phase. Earth here is a descriptive metaphor for that phase of any process wherein the expansive activity of the previous phases stops or starts to settle down. Activity is suspended in this phase, and thus this phase is associated with energetic suspension, floating (as opposed to active, outward diffusion), or waiting. Potential for all structivity or condensation is here. This is a phase of transition within the total process of transition, of relative balance or neutrality, though seen, as always, in a dynamic and not a static sense.

Phase four has been historically referred to as the metal phase. Metal here is a descriptive metaphor for that phase of any process which exhibits decided centripetal structivity. In this phase quiescence is clearly predominant, leading to condensation, consolidation, and materialization. The direction manifested is downward, but it is also predominantly inward. Energy in this phase is beginning to be in a vacuous, exhausted state.

Phase five has been historically referred to as the water phase. Water here is a descriptive metaphor for the last predominantly passive phase of any process. This phase is associated with endings, completions, finishes, and conclusions. The direction manifest is inward, but it is even more predominantly downward. Energy
in this phase is in a definite state of exhaustion or vacuity, relative to the
other phases of this particular process. This is the dark and cold extreme
of the process, and as such, it includes all the potential and some of the
beginnings of upward and outward activity.
The Universality of the Five Phases

The universality of the five phases has already been described above. For the purposes of this plan for a reformation of the five phase theory, let it be emphasized that this construct is applicable to all processes, all phenomena that arguably have a beginning and an end. Some observers of the five phases, especially those who may see the five as material substances, will be limited in their ability to make many processes fit their static, object-oriented template. For example, many observers' understanding of the earth phase is limited to a.) different versions of the material image of earth (soil, ground, land, etc.) and b.) a succession of correspondences learned by rote (the color yellow, the taste sweet, dampness, the season of late summer, flesh, the mouth, stomach, spleen, sympathy, etc., etc.). What if such an observer was asked to analyze something as different as the cycle of water in the environment? Would they be able to accurately apply five phases to this naturally occurring cycle? Would they even think such application possible?
The key to creating many new five phase correspondences, the key to applying five phases universally, is the use of criteria of analysis that are rational, logical, and not metaphoric. Such criteria for the identity of each stage are expressed at the end of the preceding chapter.

Consider, for example, the aforementioned problem of analyzing the cycle of water in the environment:

Let us begin with the consideration of water in two contradictory states of being: liquid and gas. The very existence of these extremes brings about a charge; and physical change occurs as a part of the process of balancing the charge or difference. Constantly, water becomes gas and gaseous H2O becomes water. This transformation of polarity or opposition takes place in Five Phases:

Phase One: As the water heats up, it begins to be more active, rising up from the surface of the lake in the form of vapor.

Phase Two: Increasingly effected now by the hot sun, the water molecules are very active, causing expansion of the vapor into a finer gaseous state.

Phase Three: The H2O now balances in mid-air (and in the middle of this metamorphosis) in the form of clouds. The process of vaporization has been relatively stabilized.

Phase Four: The clouds themselves have shielded the sun’s hot rays, and the cooler H2O molecules become less active, gathering together to materialize small droplets which fall as rain.

Phase Five: The downward trend culminates as the H2O comes to rest, seeking its lowest level in the lake. This stage of pooling and storage is the
coolest, least active phase of the metamorphosis we have been following.\textsuperscript{1,2}

It is also worth noting that yin/yang is similarly, and even more obviously, seen as an all pervasive pattern. Because of its simpler two-fold structure, and because it is marginally less masked by overwhelming layers of metaphor, it is more widely seen as universal. In addition, it is widely appreciated in its place in the philosophy of tao, the Oriental analog to a monotheistic divine force. For the purposes of this thesis, we can make this transfer: if one would accept that the yin/yang principle is applicable universally, and one would accept that five phase theory is but an expansion of yin/yang theory, then one could conclude that five phase theory was applicable universally.

\textsuperscript{1} Skardis, Manuscript.

The Relativity of the Five Phases

Yet another principle worth making explicit in this plan of five phase reformation is the relativity of the five phases. Phase correspondence is not dependant on the manifestation of emblematic images somewhere in the course of the phase. Rather, it is dependent on an overall evaluation of the relative energetic, spacial, and temporal position of the phase in the process as a whole.

Please imagine a story of five chapters: chapter 1 - "Water", chapter 2 - "Metal", chapter 3 - "Earth", chapter 4 - "Fire", chapter 5 - "Wood". The first chapter is filled with many physical images of water. It takes place on an ocean liner, the characters are drinking water throughout their conversation, etc. The second chapter is similarly filled with physical images of metal. It takes place in a gold mine, and the sound of metal picks and shovels is constantly audible in the background as the characters speak. The same is true of each of the chapters of the book. They are each filled with multiple references to the material element from which the chapter derives its name.
How would one proceed in a five element analysis of the story? A crude, simplistic error of object-orientation would be to assign correspondences according to the visibility of story elements metaphorically similar to the various material elements. The relativist position that this thesis posits is that each chapter gains it's five element identity from its relative position in the given process.

In the above story, despite the appearance of a multitude of water images, chapter 1 could be seen as the beginning of the plot, and a thus a wood phase or the first of five organic phases of the story. In the second chapter, multiple references to the physical element metal could be incidental to the chapter's relative place in the story; it could be seen as the chapter in which the plot unfolds most actively, thus showing it to correspond to the fire phase or phase two of the five phase or five element process of development. The chapters of this simplistic example story could thus be erroneously categorized in reverse fashions by observers from objectivist and relativist camps. Granted, many of those who use overwhelmingly metaphoric expression when teaching and using the five elements would also be able to see through this shallow example, but the potential for error is nevertheless illustrated by this story. And, though there is deeper understanding amongst those who know the metaphors best, be certain that the above error befalls many a student and many a practicing acupuncturist.

One more illustration is in order, while the above example is on the table for consideration. Imagine that the above story is one in a connected series of novels by the same author. The above mentioned chapter 1 is certainly a beginning (and a wood phase) for this story.
However, the conversation between the characters on the ocean liner may also be a long awaited resolution of plot considerations left over from the author's last novel. In that case, chapter 1 of this recent story may be all or part of the completion or water phase of the previous novel. This scenario demonstrates how relative five phase correspondences can be - correspondences can be on opposite ends of the spectrum, depending on the context in which they appear; and this is so regardless of how much physical water or wood permeates the imagery of that phase.

There is a schematic construct relevant to this discussion. The presentation of this construct here is not meant to suggest that this schema explains all aspects of the relativity of correspondences. Nevertheless, it is one neat, visualizable arrangement that illustrates the principle here discussed.

The construct is that of phases within phases. The idea is that within any phase lie sub-phases. Any division can be subdivided again, ad infinitum. Of course, while this is conceptually accurate, it is not always of practical use; yet it can at times be a convenient schema for five phase analysis.

One clinical area to which this form of analysis may be suited is psychological/behavioral analysis. If somatic illnesses can be linked to events, behaviors, mental states, or emotions experienced by the patient, then the five phase correspondences of those events, etc., may provide data for assessment of the physical complaints.
The following is from a story fabricated as a simplistic illustration of phases within phases. The first fifth of the story is referenced here, covering the first through fifth phases within the more general first phase. By way of introduction, it should be understood that this section quoted was preceded by chapters establishing five phase correspondences to behaviors, emotions, and mental states. For the purposes of the below section, it should be pointed out that planning, aspiration, reaching out, seeking, a person's purpose or dream, drive, and desire are among the correspondences made to phase one. Excitement, joy, and satisfaction are among the correspondences made to phase two. Self-reflection, evaluation, pensiveness, and cognitive thinking are among the correspondences made with phase three. Compromise, retrenchment, consolidation, retreat, and consolidation (with consequent elimination) are among the correspondences made with phase four. Completion of the cycle, respect of the need for rest or quiescence, patience, and surrender are among the correspondences made with phase five. But remember, aspiration is a key correspondence made here with phase one, and thus, all of what is quoted below is phase one; the large number one (1) indicates that the first phase is being described, and the smaller subscript number after the one indicates the phase within the phase (1, 1, 1, etc.).
Joe and His Job
An Exercise in Psychological Diagnosis
Chapter 1
Joe Aspires

1

"I'm going to look for work!" says Joe.

Commentary: solid aspiration.

2

He reads the classified job listings and sees "$$ high wages...earn big money." He gets a little excited and is satisfied he is going in the right direction.

Commentary: aspiration produces satisfaction.

3

"Wonder which one is right for me?" says Joe as he gives the list a hasty "once over."

    Commentary: this is a time when careful self-reflection is called for, but the impetus to get the project off the ground is too dominant. Aspiration reduces evaluation.

4

Joe casually and carelessly writes off most of the possibilities, quickly narrowing the field down to one job.

    Commentary: more balanced compromise at this point could have tempered the dream with a greater sense of reality. Instead the excess of drive turns back on the process of retrenchment. Aspiration insults retreat.
With his application submitted and under consideration, Joe spends the evening waiting impatiently.

Commentary: aspiration is still a bit out of hand at a time when rest needs to be respected. Aspiration defies surrender.¹

While the above example may be a bit dense and difficult to follow without the full background in the psychological manifestations highlighted, it can be appreciated as an illustration of how one phase can be broken up into five phases again, if that will further analysis.

As stated in a preceding chapter, phase assignments are relative references, not absolute references.

¹ Skardis, Manuscript.
Perhaps the history of five element objectification has a strong thread of linguistic causation running through it. Maybe some or most of the languages that have worked with Chinese medicine have inherent tendencies towards objectification of commonly used terms like these. Could it be that linguistic disorganization is the natural direction taken when original meanings are not shorn up aggressively enough over millennia, and could this be even more of a tendency in Oriental languages where one ideogram may have multiple interpretations from the beginning? Consider that even in English, known as a language of precision, we fall into habits of linguistic sloth. Rhetoric, in-house terminology, and the language of any ingrown, narrow discipline are all fertile areas that tend towards shorthand expression. In those situations, the understandable feeling is that precision of expression can be sacrificed for brevity, and the familiarity of the limited number of trained participants will compensate. Unfortunately, such
compromises produce obstructions for students, and, over generations, produce across the board changes in meaning.

Was it but a natural product of linguistic slippage that the five phases, taught for so many generations by the element/metaphor method, came to be called and then understood as the five elements? We may never know with any certainty.

Much of our Five Element research was done in the essential medical classics, the Su Wen, Ling Shu and Nan Ching, texts which are generally thought to have originated in the later part of the first millennium B.C. As sources they are rich, stimulating and satisfying. However, we can make no pretense of definitive translation. Indeed, the translation and interpretation of these books has taken the lifetimes of some of the finest scholars in several generations. Furthermore, the fact that we neither share the language nor the day to day working practices and linguistic conventions of these ancient authors must rule out any such presumption.¹

Thus, the questions posed above will remain unanswered, at least in this thesis. The reason such conjecture is allowed here is to stimulate further investigation and, more immediately, to suggest the depth of need for accurate linguistic development of a reformed five phase theory.

The first linguistic discipline prescribed is already discussed above. The term five elements must be replaced, ideally by the term five phases.

A second discipline would be to cease using the metaphoric emblems (wood, fire, etc.) as nouns (i.e. - "wood controls earth"). This practice, an efficient shorthand of the in-house style described above,

¹ Matsumoto and Birch, Five Elements, p. vii.
pushes an objectification of the phases as material elements (nouns). Instead, the metaphoric emblems can be used as adjectives. At minimum, any use of the metaphoric terminology at all must be accompanied by responsible presentation of extensively explained caveats.

A third and most productive discipline would be to develop new, non-metaphoric ways of speaking of and teaching the five phases. Destructive habits usually need to be treated with complete abstinence, even if indulgence in the habitual behavior carries perceived advantages. The non-metaphoric language within this chapter (like the simple naming of the phases by number: "phase one, phase two", etc.) should serve as a beginning.
CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

The foundations of Oriental medicine are in peril. Core concepts, including the theory of the five elements, are falling from meaningful, substantial usage, and these theories are being criticized as inadequate and fraught with logical gaps and contradictions.

While the work of renewal in these areas is fraught with potential pitfalls, such renewal is necessary. Sound, contemporary understanding of theoretical foundations is important for controlling professional compromise, for developing a psychology of Oriental medicine, and for supporting unity and cooperation within our community of Oriental medicine. Yet, the process of seeking such clarification is complicated by many factors, including the lack of support for theoretical research in modern China. That makes it all the more necessary that we pursue research of this sort in the West.

An extensive review of the English language literature makes it clear that we see an extensive objectification of the five elements.
This is true of several groupings of Western authors, as well as of Oriental authors. It seems that the use of poetic metaphor, valuable in its own right, has become excessive and in need of balancing. Even some relatively progressive sources improve on language in some areas only to fail to make the general point that the five are not, at core, material substances. Interestingly, this tendency may have been a recurring phenomena through Chinese history as well.

A corollary to the objectification of the five elements has been the divorce of the five elements from yin/yang theory. The central yin/yang character of the five phases has been lost in most of the modern literature, even though lip service is still given to the traditional transmission that the two are somehow linked.

The consequences of these developments include inaccuracy of correspondences, incomplete elucidation of the relative quality of assignments, incomplete support for the development of new five element correspondences, and the impeding of a spiritual re-contextualization of Oriental medicine.

Causes or associated factors for these developments may include the following: epistemological challenge to correspondence thinking both by the modern West and by currents in Chinese thought through the ages, the quantification of measure by quality and relationship, objectification of most phenomena, objectification of the terms yin and yang, and the divorce of yin/yang theory from virtually everything outside of a narrow clinical field of vision.

The case for a reformed five phase theory begins with the replacement of the term element with the term phase. It must proceed with contextualization of the five phase dynamic as a construct with a
rationally explainable yin/yang mechanism. Simultaneously, the universality and the relativity of the five phases must be supported. Finally, a linguistic precision must be developed and adhered to if the crumbling foundations of Oriental medicine are to be repaired. If we are successful, many generations will have a firmer base from which to adapt this ancient medicine to their times and their changing cultures.
SOURCES

CONSULTED

Academy of Chinese Acupuncture. An Outline of Chinese Acupuncture

Amber, R.B., and Babey-Brook, A. M. The Pulse in Occident and Orient

Beijing College of Traditional Medicine; Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine; Nanjing College of Traditional Medicine; and The Acupuncture Institute of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Compilers. Essentials of Chinese Acupuncture


C. S. Cheung; Yat Ki Lai; U Aik Kaw; and Harrison, Howard. *Mental Dysfunction as treated by Traditional Chinese Medicine* San Francisco: Traditional Medical Publisher, 1981.


Ni, Hua Ching. 8,000 Years of Wisdom: Conversations with Taoist Master Ni, Hua Ching. Vol. 1: Includes Dietary Guidance Malibu: The Shrine of the Eternal Breath of Tao, 1983.


_______. East West Foundation/Kushi Institute, Boston and Brookline, Massachusetts. Lectures and Interviews, 1972-1986.


