

HEALTH

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TCM

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Balancing act

Yin and yang are familiar terms to many people. But their diverse meanings can lead to confusion.

Yin and yang are important components of Taoist philosophy. Taoism was a school of thought that originated in about 550BC and attempted to explain the origin of the universe and the interacting forces of nature.

The terms yin and yang combine in an opposing, yet complementary manner and establish a dynamic thought process that applies to every aspect of life. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), yin and yang are used to explain how the body works.

The concept of yin and yang came from observing nature and the surrounding environment. The ancient Chinese held that the world is material but has non-material aspects, and that mutual actions of the two opposite forces known as yin and yang mean it is evolving constantly.

Later, this thinking became the fundamental principle in describing how the universe functioned. Yin and yang were used to denote any opposed yet complementary aspects of objects or phenomena.

According to the *Huangdi Neijing* (Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic): "Yin yang could amount to 10 in number, be extended to 100, to 1,000, to 10,000 and ever to the infinite."

Some examples of opposed yet complementary forces in nature described using yin-yang include water and fire, winter and summer, physical and functional, and life and death.

Yang is usually associated with masculine qualities, whereas yin is associated with the feminine.

The core of the yin-yang concept can be simply interpreted from its symbol (below). The circle symbolises the universe, which possesses two opposite forces: the yin (dark side) and the yang (light side). The curved line between the two denotes cyclic motion and change of yin into yang and yang into yin. The black and white dots refer to the interdependence between yin and yang, which can't exist without containing a bit of each other. The two colours are in equal proportion. When there's more of one side, there'll be less of the other.

The yin-yang concept has a profound influence on the behaviour of many Chinese. They view the world as a harmonious and holistic entity, and all living beings are seen in relation to the surrounding environment.

Climatic changes in seasons reflect the mutual wax and wane of yin and yang. From spring to summer, as the weather turns hot gradually the change is dominated by yang. From autumn to winter, as the weather turns cold, the change is dominated by yin.

Since humans live in this holistic entity, they'll be influenced directly and indirectly by the changes, and make corresponding physiological and pathological responses. By eating seasonal foods that are similar in nature to the external environment, we remain in harmony with the environment and adapt better to seasonal changes to stay healthy.

Generally, yin and yang are only descriptions or indicators to explain the dual aspects of objects. They shouldn't be viewed as an entity in the western sense, but as two opposite qualities that complement each other.

So, when you have queries about yin and yang, tune your mind into traditional Chinese thinking. To what situation is yin and yang applied this time? What are the two opposite components and what is the proportional balance between them?

By asking these questions, you may gain insight into how to rebalance and step into a holistic way of life.

Yin and yang will be discussed further in next week's column

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