

CHINESE MEDICINE: A GUIDED TOUR WITH ILLUSTRATIONS & COMICS

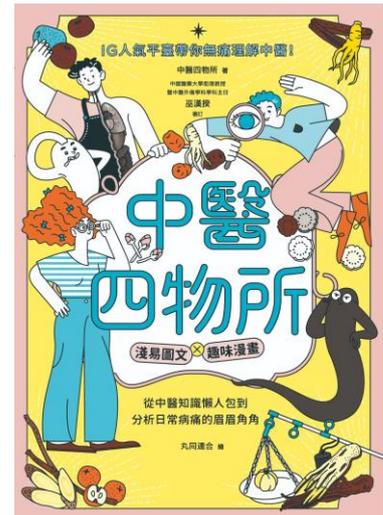
中醫四物所:

淺易圖文×趣味漫畫，從中醫知識懶人包到分析日常病痛的眉眉角角，IG 人氣平臺帶你無痛理解中醫！

With over a thousand years of history, Chinese medicine remains the preferred treatment option for many in Taiwan. Packed with easy-to-understand illustrations, explanations, and comic strip interludes, this book introduces readers to the fascinating world of traditional medicine, from theory and diagnosis to herbs and acupuncture.

With over one thousand years of history, Chinese medicine is based in the traditional medical practices of the Han Chinese people. In contemporary Taiwan, this medicine continues to develop and advance, and it remains the treatment option of choice for many Taiwanese even as Western medicine has become widely available. Through easily understood explanations, illustrations, and comics (and a touch of humor), this book introduces readers to the uniquely fascinating world of Chinese medicine.

The first chapter begins with basic concepts, explaining the differences between Chinese medicine and Western medicine, the meaning of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements, and the Chinese medical understanding of the human body and disease. The second chapter explores how doctors of Chinese medicine evaluate symptoms to diagnose disease, and how readers can treat basic



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ailments through medical massage and dietary changes. The third chapter is devoted to the herbs of Chinese medicine, explaining how they are classified according to their basic medical properties, and how they are used in treatment. Finally, the last chapter looks at modernization and change as Chinese medicine expands in unexpected directions, including electroacupuncture, fitness, and veterinary medicine.

The origin of this book is the Siwutopia social media platform, which amassed over 15,000 followers on Instagram by making Chinese medicine more approachable through jargon-free explanations, humor, and relatable comic strips involving a repeating cast of characters. Now in print form, book readers can follow along with Lil' Yin, Lil' Yang, Lanky Joe, and his sister Miss Curves as they learn about the fascinating and practical wisdom of Chinese medicine!

Siwutopia 中醫四物所

Founded by two Chinese medicine interns, Siwutopia is a social media platform for promoting Chinese medicine concepts to a wider audience. Each of the founders began their careers in unrelated fields, and, despite their vastly different personality types, both chose to begin new careers in Chinese medicine. While stuck at home during the pandemic, they decided to start the Siwutopia platform on Instagram to share interesting content they had picked up over the course of their studies, explaining difficult Chinese medicine concepts in plain language, and, hopefully, making it fun. Their goal is to help Chinese medicine become part of their readers' daily lives.

UN-TONED Media 丸同連合

A design studio specializing in book jacket design, UN-TONED Media takes its name from the concept of atonal music, implying that multiple voices can sing their own unique songs while still achieving mutual coherence and harmony.

CHINESE MEDICINE: A GUIDED TOUR WITH ILLUSTRATIONS & COMICS

By Siwutopia

Translated by William Ceurvels

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Part 1: Basic Concepts in Chinese Medicine

1.1 Differences Between Western and Chinese Medicine

Have you ever seen a Chinese medical doctor? Did they tell you, “You’ve got a case of wind stroke!”, “Your issue is due to phlegm!” or “You’ve got kidney deficiency!”? At the end of the consult, did you find yourself horrified but still nodding your head despite not having a clue what the doctor was talking about? Sound familiar?

So, what exactly do Chinese medicine doctors mean when they say these things? To answer this question, we must first understand how the ancient Chinese understood the physiology and structure of the human body, and clarify the differences between Western and Chinese medicine.

Medicine Starts with Observation

Curiosity and observation are the starting point for technological development. As soon as we become curious about our surroundings, we then begin to search for the mechanisms and rules underlying what we see and hope to use these “explanations” to prosper and thrive. Throughout the history of human development, disease has continually presented a major challenge to humankind. Medicine, the science of prolonging human life, arose and developed in response to this challenge.

How Western Medicine Conceives of the Body

Western and Chinese medicine's differing observational perspectives have led them to follow two completely different trajectories of development. From the viewpoint of Western medicine, advancements in modern technology have brought about new possibilities for the medicine. Ever more powerful instruments allow scientists to see things humans have never seen before and the scope of observation has gradually progressed from the macroscopic to the microscopic. As scientists conduct ever more in-depth research and finally come to understand all the pathogenic mechanisms of a disease (you can think of these as all the steps in the progression of a disease), it is as if they are developing a detailed map of the body's inner functioning. Doctors and scientists can then focus on specific steps on that map and research and develop specifically targeted drugs to address that aspect of the disease.

As an example, Western medicine has used improved instruments and focused research to discover the body's heat regulating center. When we get a fever from a cold, we can use anti-pyretic medication (Acetaminophen, the main compound in Tylenol) which acts on the heat-regulating center within the brain to stop the fever. Additionally, developments in pathology have allowed us to discover a host of different fever-causing bacteria. Through researching the structures, physiology and effect on the human body of these bacteria, medical scientists can develop specialized drugs to suppress or eradicate them.

However, if we forcibly impose Western medical logic onto our understanding of Chinese medicine, we might encounter certain difficulties. At times, these difficulties might be enough to make someone want to slam this book shut and release a stream of expletives (The author refuses to admit the self-referential nature of this sentence!). Yet, if we just shift our perspective, we can immediately gain clarity on a number of questions. So, for the moment, why not put aside your fixed beliefs and, armed with a more open and accepting attitude, enter into the world of the ancient Chinese, a world where the body was viewed from a more holistic perspective.

The Chinese Medical Outlook in the Context of Daoist Philosophy

As stated above, ancient people derived their understanding of the laws that govern the natural world through observation. Yet, in contrast to the west, since antiquity the Chinese have been influenced by the Daoist belief that all things behave according to an all-encompassing law or principle which they call the "dao". But what exactly is the dao? Lao Tzu famously stated, "The dao that can be named is not the eternal dao." This statement implies that while all phenomena are governed by laws and axioms that can be investigated and described, so-called "eternal laws" are not immutable. In everyday life, the diversity of the natural world is an excellent example of how "what appears to be manifold in form still conforms to universal principles". As the ancient Chinese encountered and strived to identify the root causes of various illnesses, they cleverly applied conclusions they had made from their observation of the natural world to their understanding of Chinese medicine. This process accounts for some of the more interesting features of the Chinese medical perspective of the human body.

For example, the ancient Chinese were not aware of the existence of bacteria or viruses, but they observed that some people would get sick after changes in the weather or after being exposed to cold wind, thus, they attributed the illness to “wind” and “cold”. Or, for instance, as Chinese physicians came to understand that the liver’s¹ function was to manage the flow of qi and blood throughout the body, they noticed that this function was evocative of the branching of trees and the flourishing fecundity of the spring season, so the liver, wood, and spring became associated concepts in Chinese medicine. In a similar fashion, other seasons came to be associated with other organs and bowels based upon their common features: Summer is associated with the heart, fall with the lungs, winter with the kidneys and the spleen, and stomach with the late summer.

You might be saying to yourself, “The body is just tissues and organs. What does that have to do with spring, summer, or trees?” Yet these seemingly unrelated terms combine to form a dense web of associations that constitute the basis of Chinese medicine’s holistic approach to understanding the body’s various manifestations of illness. When treating a patient’s illness, Chinese doctors will not just focus on symptoms and signs, they will also consider the effect that the external environment might be exerting on the patient. Factors such as seasonal variations in temperature and humidity or geographic location will all have an influence on the course of disease, and, in turn, will affect how the doctor decides to treat the patient. This relationship between the body and its surrounding environment is what Chinese medicine calls “the mutual responsivity between humanity and nature”.

How Does Chinese Medicine Make Diagnoses Without Diagnostic Instruments?

Given that Chinese medicine traditionally did not make use of ultrasound, X-ray, and CT scans, how do Chinese doctors go about making diagnoses? In modern Chinese medical practice, doctors use something called “pattern identification as the basis for treatment”. Put simply, pattern identification entails first collecting various information about the patient including their medical history, lab results, complexion, tongue diagnosis findings, radial pulse findings, and any symptoms the patient mentions. The doctor then evaluates this information to arrive at a diagnosis, as well as an understanding of the patient’s constitution, after which they prescribe a suitable form of treatment. A “pattern” can be understood as a collection of several different related symptoms. For example, when a patient presents with fatigue, weakness, shortness of breath, a quiet, forceless voice, poor appetite, dizziness, a pale-colored tongue, and a thin, weak radial pulse, they will be diagnosed with a “qi-deficient” pattern. However, some patterns might have overlapping symptom presentations – blood deficiency is also marked by dizziness, for instance – so the doctor must consider the entire set of symptoms as a whole to come to an

¹ Please note that the Chinese medical concept of the liver does not correspond directly to the anatomical liver in biomedicine. While the Chinese medical conception of the organs is informed by anatomical knowledge, organs are primarily defined by a set of physiological functions and pathological symptom manifestations. (translator)

accurate diagnosis. Indeed, in some cases, a patient may present with multiple “patterns” – in such instances, the physician must rely on their clinical experience to make the right determination.

No discussion of Chinese medical diagnosis is complete without mentioning the four methods of diagnosis: “observation”, “auscultation and smelling”, “inquiry”, and “palpation and pulse taking”. Readers that have visited a Chinese doctor before likely have heard of the four methods, but may not have a detailed understanding of these forms of diagnosis. In the following, we’ll give a brief overview of these pillars of Chinese diagnostics.

“Observation” refers to the physician using their keen powers of perception to evaluate visual data regarding your appearance and movement. For instance, the physician might be able to tell you have a structural issue from the way you walk. It is also common for doctors to inspect the patient’s tongue – this “tongue examination” is another form of observation. For example, if the patient’s tongue coating is yellow, unless they have had some food or drink like coffee or fruit that might alter the color of their coating, the yellow coating might indicate that the patient has “heat”. Alternately, some patients will present with a large, swollen tongue that exceeds the width of their mouth when they stick it out – this tells the physician that the patient has excessive dampness.

In the “auscultation and smelling” portion of the diagnosis, the physician observes the patient’s voice and body odor. For example, they’ll listen to the sound of their cough, the strength or lack thereof of their voice and note their breath and body odor.

“Inquiry” refers to the history taking portion of the diagnosis. Through inquiry, the physician learns about any discomfort the patient may have and what is the nature and time of onset of their pain.

Finally, in “palpation and pulse taking”, the physician primarily inspects the pulse at the patient’s radial artery right below the wrists, feeling for the strength, size, position, speed, and tension of the pulse. In Chinese medical terminology, these parameters are referred to as “Position, speed, shape, and dynamic”. In Chinese medicine, the palpable radial pulse below the wrist is divided into three positions called the “cun”, “guan” and “chi”, which correspond to various organs and bowels. For instance, the left “guan”, corresponds to the liver. When an abnormal pulse is felt at this position, this signals that there may be a problem with the liver.

However, if the above discussion has led you to believe that modern Chinese medical doctors only use these four diagnostic methods and do not make use of any modern diagnostic tools, you would be mistaken! In reality, modern Chinese doctors will also use the results of ultrasound and X-ray exams to inform their diagnosis. Modern diagnostic tools allow Chinese doctors to make even more precise assessments of their patients’ conditions and discover issues that traditional forms of diagnosis may overlook. We’ll introduce diagnostic equipment used in Chinese medical clinics in Chapter Four!

Chinese and Western Medical Collaboration

You might be thinking to yourself, “I knew it all along! When it comes down to it, Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine are just two completely different systems of healing.” This is only partially true. The “laws” mentioned in “The Chinese Medical Outlook in the Context of Daoist Philosophy” and the “map” discussed in “How Western Medicine Conceives of the Body” might appear like quite different concepts upon first glance, but be it Western or Chinese medicine, these concepts are all deployed to construct a map of the body – the only real difference is the map’s scale. Using Taiwan as an analogy for the body, Western medicine’s map zooms in on specific alleyways and details the intricate layouts of individual communities, whereas Chinese medicine’s map takes a bird’s eye view of the geographic locations of various counties and their relative positions. In this analogy, becoming ill is akin to getting lost – at such times we’ll certainly immediately take out our phone and check Google maps, zooming in and out to get a sense of where we are, what’s nearby and how to get back on route. This ability to zoom in and out as we please on Google maps is similar to our current situation in the modern medical world where we have the privilege of viewing the body from the differing perspectives of Chinese Medicine and Western medicine to optimize health.

In videogaming, there is a gaming strategy called speedrunning in which players use super-human speeds to play through a game as fast as possible. Imagine for a moment that you want to speedrun a racing game: what would your strategy be? It goes without saying that you would first want to find the shortest possible route, right? Thus, in preparing for a successful run, just working on your drifting skills won’t cut it, you’ll need to work on something even more important: studying the map. However, if you don’t have a map of the entire course, how can you find the shortest route? By the same logic, if you only have Western medicine’s “map” to rely on, you might not be seeing how the body functions in its entirety. Combining Western and Chinese medical perspectives brings out the best in both healing modalities while reducing oversights from their respective blind spots.

Luckily for everyone, collaboration between Chinese and Western medicine is already in progress. With the help of modern scientific research, Chinese medicine is now able to zero-in on the body at a molecular level and new studies are uncovering the hidden potential of herbs, all of which helps physicians fight illness with increasing precision. Chinese medicine, for its part, has led Western medicine to explore more holistic perspectives on disease. For instance, recent epidemiological studies have found that emotions, diet and living environment can also act as disease-causing agents (this will be covered below in the next chapter). Western medicine has also slowly started to embrace the Chinese medical notion that the same disease might manifest differently in different constitutions.

I once had a fan on Instagram ask me: “As a Chinese doctor, do you still use western medicine?” Anyone who has read the previous section probably already knows the answer: in this modern age of rapid technological progress, why would anyone reject the use of newer methods of diagnosis and treatment in supplementary and primary care? The Chinese medical world (including herbal medicine and acupuncture) is also deeply invested in making Chinese medicine an evidence-based medicine, and through collaboration and exchange with Western medicine, we

hope to encourage people that previously had misgivings about Chinese medicine to take that first step and give themselves another option in their path to healing.

1-2 Chinese Medicine 101: Yin-Yang and Five Element Theory

What is the Meaning of Yin and Yang?

What comes to mind when you think of “yin-yang”? The word often appears in martial arts novels and tales of the supernatural; it evokes a certain sense of excitement and mystery. But did you know that it’s also used in Chinese medicine? In fact, the concept of yin-yang permeates every aspect of Chinese medical theory. If you were to pare down all the vast complexity of Chinese medicine to just its most basic foundational structure, you would be left with this simple yet most profound notion of “yin-yang”. Thus, if you want to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese medicine, the best place to start is with yin-yang.

The concept of yin-yang in Chinese medicine derives from ancient peoples’ observation of the natural world and explains various phenomena observed in daily life in terms of their mutual relations. For instance, fall and winter are yin seasons, while spring and summer are yang seasons. By the same logic, nighttime is considered yin, while daytime is considered yang. In terms of the body’s internal structures, the five organs fall under the category of yin, while the six bowels are yang. This categorization scheme provides a basic means of distinguishing between the various functions of each organ and bowel. Yin-yang is also used in Chinese medical diagnosis – for instance, skin rashes with a yellow or red hue are considered yang, while darker-colored rashes are considered yin. Physicians also make use of yin-yang theory in pulse-taking to establish a general idea of a patient’s condition – a faster pulse is a sign of a yang disorder, while a slower pulse indicates an yin disorder. Additionally, yin and yang serve as conceptual categories for distinguishing various states of disease – for instance, a yang “deficient” patient will present with a pallid complexion, cold hands and feet, fatigue, spontaneous sweating and other such symptoms. Finally, even the herbal medicine used after establishing a diagnosis is categorized according to yin and yang. For example, herbs that promote sweating and strengthen the heart are considered yang herbs.

That being said, yin-yang involves a lot more than just crudely placing all phenomena into one of two categories! Have you ever noticed how the yin-yang sign divides the black and white portions with a curvy s-shaped line instead of a straight line? In actuality, this signifies that yin-yang represents not a simple dichotomy, but rather a dynamic relationship of mutual transformation. As we all know, in springtime, the natural world flourishes with growth and yang qi begins to activate, while in winter, all life settles into rest. The changing of the seasons is perhaps the most poignant example of this mutually-transforming relationship in yin-yang theory. Despite being a rather abstract concept, yin-yang’s simultaneously dualistic and mutually-transforming nature makes it perfectly suited for understanding the dynamic process behind the

symptom presentation of a disease in various stages of development. It is for this reason that yin-yang serves as the core conceptual foundation of all aspects of Chinese medicine. This one guiding principle orients Chinese medical physicians in a general direction, allowing them to then perform more detailed diagnoses of the body's disharmonies. This is why the entire treatment process in Chinese medicine, from diagnosis to prescription, is all built upon the foundation of yin-yang theory and the ultimate goal of Chinese medical treatment is to arrive at a state of harmony between yin and yang.

Five Element Theory

Five element theory is another concept taken right from the pages of a martial arts novel. Now that you have a basic grasp of yin-yang theory, you have likely surmised that just this one concept probably wouldn't be quite adequate to encapsulate the entirety of the body's complicated inner workings. The wise sages of old came to the same conclusion and developed a system based upon five elements found in the natural world – wood, fire, earth, metal and water – and the unique features that these elements display to represent the organs and bowels.

- **Wood:** Due to its appearance and the way it grows, wood is seen to have an upbearing, effusing and “orderly outreaching” nature and is associated with the liver.
- **Fire:** Warm and ascending in nature, fire is associated with the heart.
- **Earth:** As all life emerges from the earth, earth is seen to have an engendering, containing, embodying and moist nature and is associated with the spleen.
- **Metal:** Hard and solid in form, metal has a descending, constraining and astringing nature and is associated with the lung.
- **Water:** Water provides nourishment for all life, it has a downward flowing nature and is associated with the Kidney.

No discussion of five element theory is complete without covering the meaning behind the way the elements are ordered. The order mentioned above – wood, fire, earth, metal and water – is not random, but rather reflects the engendering and inhibiting relationships between the elements. You might have noticed that the picture above seems to depict certain situations and dynamics that bear a striking resemblance to your own daily life. This is not a mere coincidence! The ancient Chinese also derived these relationships from their practical experience. For instance, we can imagine how the idea of wood engendering fire reflects the ancients' understanding of how starting a fire requires wood. Likewise, the notion that earth engenders metal may be derived from the fact that many rare earth elements and minerals are mined from the ground. You can check the other engendering relationships like “water engenders wood” and “metal engenders water” and see if they also square with your practical experience.

Perhaps the most well-known of the mutually-inhibiting relationships is “wood inhibits earth”. In this context, inhibiting means to restrain excess or reign in excessive tendencies. Put

plainly, this means cracking down on someone who's acting up. Thus, for instance, in the case of "wood inhibits earth", the upbearing, effusing and outreaching nature of wood assists earth's ability to contain and transform. In the natural world, the water and minerals in the earth help trees to grow, while the roots of a healthy, strong tree help to secure and stabilize otherwise loose soil, protecting it from being washed out during rainstorms. This mutually engendering relationship creates the conditions for flourishing vitality and a harmonious natural environment.

Apart from mutual engendering and inhibition, five element theory also contains two even more complicated relationships known as "mutual overwhelming" and "mutual rebellion". Overwhelming describes a kind of exaggerated inhibition occurring in the normal sequence of five element inhibition. For instance, wood inhibiting earth is a normal form of inhibition, but if wood becomes too strong and excessively inhibits earth, or if earth itself is too deficient and cannot handle wood's normal inhibition, overwhelming occurs. By contrast, mutual rebellion describes an exaggerated inhibition occurring in the reverse sequence of five element inhibition. Thus, if wood, which should be inhibited by metal, becomes too strong, it can turn around and inhibit metal. Likewise, if metal is too weak, wood becomes relatively strong and can reverse sequence and excessively inhibit metal – this is called mutual rebellion.

All this talk of mutual rebellion and mutual overwhelming can be quite... overwhelming, so let's review what we've learned so far. We've devoted a lot of space above to explaining five element theory, but in practice, physicians do not rely solely on five element mutual engendering and inhibition ideas to explain patients' pathologies. So, if you take anything away from this section, it should be that the fundamental goal in Chinese medical treatment is to "regulate disharmony in the body and balance yin-yang and the five elements to return the body to a healthy state". If you've got this concept down, you've already grasped the essence of this chapter! Having established these fundamental ideas, the next series of chapters will now discuss how yin, yang, and the five elements each correspond to various aspects of the body.