Yin and Yang Simplified

Yin and Yang are fundamental concepts in Chinese Medicine. Understanding Yin and Yang will give you another way to consider the concerns of your clients.

Like so many foundational theories, Yin and Yang is once simple and complex. Living in the western world, our minds are often challenged to understand the ancient wisdom and applications of Yin and Yang. My intention is to make these concepts available to the western mind so that you too may benefit from this profound perspective.

Night and Day

Yin and Yang is as simple as night and day. It's dark at night, and bright during the day. Together, day and night complete a 24 hour cycle referred to as “one day”, which corresponds to a single rotation of the Earth. Easy!

So for the single entity of a particular calendar date there are two divisions we can make: daytime and nighttime.
That's one thing, a *particular calendar date*, made of two things, daytime and nighttime.

We know that daytime will become nighttime, and nighttime will become daytime. It's been happening our whole life. Slow down your thinking for a moment. Notice how subtle the change is from day to night. This movement is happening fluidly all the time. Look at the clock right now. Although you have marked a moment in this cycle, the cycle continues on. Regardless of your time zone, or whether your clock is correct, day and night increase and decrease, move and flow constantly.

This simple movement of day to night to day is a rhythm that sets the pace of our lives.

Chinese medicine sees humans as a tiny copy of world around us. We are influenced by the events of Nature, as in day and night, and we also have those same rhythms and forces within us.

Daytime and all of the characteristics associated with it are considered Yang. Nighttime and all of the characteristics associated with it are considered Yin. The contrast of these two forces allows us to recognize them. Could you know day without night or vice versa?
Yin and Yang exist in relation to one another, are completely dependent on one another, and constantly shift into the other. The Chinese symbol for the relationship and movement of Yin and Yang is called the Taiji:

Here we see Yin as the black swoosh and Yang as the white.

**A few important details:**

1. There is a tiny bit of Yang in the Yin, and of Yin in Yang. This reminds us that nothing is purely one or other. Everything is known in relation to something else.
2. The curves remind us that these two forces are always in motion, always dancing with each other.
3. Yin and Yang are contained within a single circle. The single circle symbolizes the unified whole that Yin and Yang emerge from. This unified whole is known as the Tao. (‘dow’)
4. From a single thing, from the One, the Tao, springs two opposing, dependent forces, Yin and Yang. From these two, everything known is understood as mixture and manifestation of Yin and Yang.

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Although they are single terms, Yin and Yang are terms that encompass many qualities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damp</td>
<td>Dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nighttime</td>
<td>Daytime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still</td>
<td>Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood</td>
<td>Qi (energy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dense</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>Immaterial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Imagine it is the middle of a sunny day in summer. What is it like, what is going on, what are people, birds, animals doing, what does the sky look like? Read the list of Yang qualities again and get a feel for Yang.

Imagine is the middle of the night on that same day. What is it like, what is going on, what are people, birds, animals doing, what does the sky look like? Read the list of Yin qualities again and get a feel for Yin.
The philosophy of Yin and Yang was created by people who lived 5,000 years ago. They were outside in the elements. They observed nature in order to understand life. You and I have the same opportunity to observe nature in order to embody an understanding of Yin and Yang. It is as simple as noticing what is different in everything you can observe during the day and during the night.

Every thing, person, or event can be understood as a blend of Yin and Yang. The nature or qualities of the thing, person or event are revealed by the relative amounts of Yin and Yang.

For example, some people have loud voices, are always moving even when seated, and look forward to their daily group aerobic class that is fast paced with loud music. Other people have quiet voices, tend toward stillness, and look forward to their daily practice of meditation, in silence, by themselves.

These descriptions are stereotypical in order to highlight differences. If we put these two people together, we would say that the louder one is Yang in relation to the quieter one. But! And there is always a but...if we put the meditating person next to a sleeping cat, the cat would be Yin in relation to the Yang meditator. If this cat wakes up and starts playing with papers while the person continues meditating, the roles switch. This is the dance of Yin and Yang. Everything changes. Yin becomes Yang, Yang becomes Yin. Day becomes night, night becomes day. Everything is relative to another.
Applying Yin - Yang Theory to health and healing

Within Yin Yang theory, health can be described as a balance of Yin and Yang. “Balance” here means that Yin and Yang are plentiful even though they shift in relation to each other over the course of a day, week, month, year, lifetime.

You want plenty of Yang energy during the day inspiring your activities. You also want plenty of Yin energy at night inspiring a restful, sound sleep. The relative balance of Yang is greater in the day and smaller at night, and this is “balance and flow”, “health.” Just like the Sun is in the sky during the day but not at night.

What happens if there is not enough Yin to “subdue” or overtake the Yang at night? Now you have Yang activity at night, otherwise known as insomnia. What happens if there is not enough Yang to overtake or spring forth in the morning? Now you have Yin activity in the morning and the day, also known as fatigue.
Time for pictures:

Since Yang refers to the Sun, daytime, heat, it is also reflected in the element of Fire and the color red. Yin refers to night, damp, cool so it is reflected in the element of Water and the color blue:

- Night
- Water
- Dark
- Cold
- Wet
- Internal
- Quiet

- Day
- Fire
- Bright
- Hot
- Dry
- External
- Loud

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In the above example, Yang and Yin are of equal amounts. Assuming that these amounts are plenty for whoever this is a picture of and that they are dancing nicely with each other through day and night, we could say this is “perfect health.”

Imagine meeting this person:

![Diagram of equal Yang and Yin]

Now, imagine meeting this person:

![Diagram of Yin dominating Yang]
Take a moment to describe these characters. Notice that you are able to create an image of a person based on understanding the energetic forces within them.

How about health issues? Here are qualities of the body described via Yin and Yang:

- **YIN**
  - Chronic
  - Cold
  - Fatigue
  - Heavy
  - Damp
  - Blue/Black

- **YANG**
  - Acute
  - Hot
  - Hyperactive
  - Light
  - Dry
  - Red

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What if your client has a basic constitution of extra Yang in relation to Yin, what might their symptoms be?

**Possible Conditions:**

- Dry Skin
- Difficulty relaxing
- Hyperactive
- Trouble sleeping
- High blood pressure
- Fast heart rate
- Night sweats

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What if your client has a basic constitution of extra Yin in relation to Yang, what might their symptoms be?

**Possible Conditions:**

- Damp, sweaty skin
- Chronic Fatigue
- Heavy
- Lethargic
- Trouble waking
- Low blood pressure
- Slow heart rate
Notice that you are to predict manifested symptoms based on energetic forces.

Imagine shifting the energetic forces to a more balanced place. What happens to the manifested symptoms? Yes, they dissipate.

This is the fundamental difference between Chinese medicine and western medicine. Western medicine looks for and evaluates manifested conditions. Once diagnosed, the manifested condition is treated. Chinese medicine looks for the energetic balance or imbalance. Once diagnosed we work to balance Yin and Yang with the notion that the manifested condition will then dissipate.

By shifting the balance of Yin and Yang we change all of the manifested conditions. If we only treat the manifestation of the Yin Yang imbalance chances are that it will return, or a different manifestation of the imbalance will pop up.

**How to work with Yin and Yang**

Chinese medicine has many different modalities to affect Yin and Yang. Acupuncture, herbs, moxibustion (application of heat), massage (tuina), exercise (Qi Gong, Taiji, DaoYin), meditation, nutrition and lifestyle considerations. All of these modalities are based on the same theory of Yin and Yang. Depending on the severity and location of the issue different methods of treatment are chosen.

Regardless of the methods you practice, you can use them to support the relative balance and flow and Yin and Yang. You can also make concrete
lifestyle suggestions to support your client's return to balance. When Yin and Yang are balanced and flowing they manifest as a balanced, flowing, strong, flexible, responsive, happy, content, curious person.

**Hands on principles for supporting Yin and Yang**

Yang likes to move! The Yang areas of the body are the posterior aspect and the head. It is probably already your experience that you can work more vigorously on the back than the belly, on the outer legs than the inner. To awaken Yang, add more motion and quicker strokes to the Yang areas (except the head of course). You might find that your client is more talkative when you address these areas, allow your energy to rise, to be more active and stimulating.

Yin likes to be quiet. The Yin areas of the body are the anterior areas. Approach these areas more slowly and quietly, yet deeply as Yin is in the interior while Yang is exterior. Check your own energy and interaction, quiet yourself down, encourage your client to breath and feel themselves deeply.

Yin and Yang are core principles within Chinese medicine and the practice of Meridian Massage. Meridian massage addresses these energies specifically through hands-on contact with the meridians and points. Meridians are lines of flow for our energy, which directly reflects Yin and Yang. This energy, known as Qi (“chee”), although invisible, could be thought of as the vehicle for Yin and Yang to flow within our human body.

Wishing you good health and happiness!

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Founder of Big Tree School of Natural Healing

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