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Studies

Community Wellness



Traditional Chinese Medicine:

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Welcome to the Center for Buddhist Studies Community Wellness Digest!

In this monthly email, we share wisdom from Buddhist teachings you can use in your daily life, wellness tips, and information about university and community events. After a successful launch in Spring 2021, we are expanding the newsletter with a team of expert contributors and new sections. Each month will feature a theme--this month we explore **Traditional Chinese Medicine**.

The opinions expressed in the books, articles, and websites referenced in this newsletter are those of the original authors and publishers, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Buddhist Studies, the editors, the editorial board, or the organization to which the authors are affiliated. If you have questions concerning these opinions, please

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Sincerely,
Jiang Wu
Director, Center for Buddhist Studies



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TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

As the seasons change here in the northern hemisphere and respiratory illnesses start to circulate more frequently, our minds turn to keeping ourselves healthy during the colder months. Despite the widespread availability of vaccines and boosters, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our daily lives and many are looking for ways to boost immunity and improve our overall health.

In recent decades, many people in the West have turned to “alternative” or “complementary” practices from Asia and elsewhere to help prevent and treat health issues that don’t respond as well to Western interventions or drugs. Our partnership with the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine highlights the myriad ways Asian traditions address mental, physical and spiritual health.

In this edition of our Community Wellness Newsletter, we explore one of those practices, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the system of care developed in China over the course of the past two millennia. Traditionally, TCM has been used across Asia and now patients around the globe can access information and treatments for a wide range of disorders.

Disclaimer: The content provided in this newsletter is informational only. Please consult your physician for diagnosis and care specific to your unique situation.

WHAT IS TCM?

TCM encompasses a wide range of practices and treatments that address the overall health of a patient. Common treatments include acupuncture, acupressure, traditional herbal remedies, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, tuina massage, and cupping.

A TCM practitioner approaches a patient from a holistic perspective, taking into account how the mind, body, and spirit interact with the environment, the seasons, diet, and other factors. A diagnosis follows a different logic from Western approaches. A Western doctor listens to the patient’s complaint, assesses the symptoms, and makes a disease diagnosis based on an individual set of symptoms. A TCM practitioner will take in the whole of the person, examining their skin, tongue, bowel movements, pulse, emotional and behavioral signs, and other factors, which lead to a diagnosis based upon an overall pattern.

In *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*, Ted J. Kaptchuk of Harvard Medical School explains that “the logic of Chinese medicine is organismic or synthetic, attempting to organize symptoms and signs into understandable configurations. The total configurations, the patterns of disharmony, provide the framework for treatment” (p. 4).



Qi

One central principle of TCM holds that a key to health and balance is the clear flow of *Qi* (or *Chi*) throughout the system. Qi is difficult to define. Sometimes translated as “vital energy” or “life force,” it is considered in Chinese philosophy as the state of being of all things in the universe, something between matter and energy that allows for the potential for transformation. “Qi is the cause, process, and outcome of all activity in the cosmos” (*The Web*, p. 44). An excess or deficiency of Qi or an obstruction in the flow of Qi through the body along lines called meridians leads to imbalance and possible illness.



YIN YANG THEORY

Balance within the whole also characterizes the philosophy of *Yin* and *Yang*, two contrasting and interconnected components that describe relationships between entities and the universe. Yin and Yang theory emerged out of Taoist philosophy and informs many facets of Chinese thought, including the medical system.

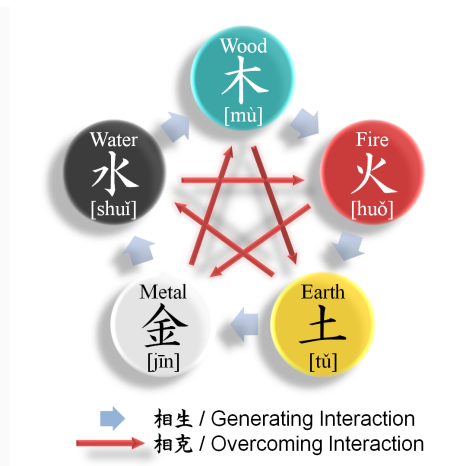
Yin originally meant the dark side of a mountain slope and is associated with qualities like cold, rest, responsiveness, passivity, darkness, interiority, downwardness, inwardness, decrease, satiation, and tranquility. It is associated with water and depicted with the color black (see image above).

Yang was defined as the sunny side of the slope and is associated with brightness, heat, stimulation, movement, activity, excitement, vigor, exteriority, upwardness, outwardness, and increase. It is associated with fire and depicted with the color white (see image above).

All things are considered to have a Yin and Yang component that are mutually dependent upon one another and can transform into the other. Illnesses associated with weakness, slowness, coldness and underactivity are Yin. Forceful movements, heat and over-activity relate to Yang.

When visiting a TCM doctor in modern times, the practitioner will often use the eight principles in diagnosis, one of which is Yin and Yang.

- Exterior and Interior
 - Cold and Hot
 - Empty and Full
 - Yin and Yang
-



WUXING - FIVE PHASES

In addition to Yin Yang theory, another conceptual framework guides TCM: *Wuxing* or Five Phases. Although the concept is often translated as Five Elements to correspond with the Greek Classical Elements, the terms “phases” or “agents” are now preferred. Rather than a description of physical matter, the phases indicate relationships between phenomena or processes of change within the body or the universe.

When arranged in the “mutual production” order, the phases are: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water (see image above). Each phase relates to organs in the body that are further divided into Yin and Yang organs. Those associated with Yin are *zang* organs and those associated with Yang are *fu* organs, which make up the [zang-fu](#) network. Zang organs are Heart, Liver, Spleen, Lung, Kidney, while fu organs are Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Gall Bladder, Urinary Bladder, and Stomach. Zang and fu organs are paired together and then mapped onto the Wuxing schematic as seen in the following table:

Phase	Zang	Fu
Earth	Spleen	Stomach
Metal	Lung	Large Intestine
Water	Kidney	Bladder
Wood	Liver	Gall Bladder
Fire	Heart	Small Intestine

Acupuncturists use the Five Phases in what is usually called five elements acupuncture. Each meridian, of which there are twelve, also correspond with specific Yin or Yang organs and are divided into six bilateral hand and six foot meridians. Points along the meridians, which run vertically up and down the body, serve as entryways for acupuncture needles. An acupuncturist will place needles at particular points on the meridians depending upon the patient’s symptoms and overall pattern of disharmony.

Tai Chi follows the Five Phases scheme with slow movements targeted to unify body and breath while activating or moving Chi in and through the organs. This diagram from the Universal Healing Tao Center in Chiangmai, Thailand

shows the correspondence between the Five Phases, organs, sounds, colors, emotions, seasons, senses, and virtues. An exercise would be recommended based upon a diagnosis from a TCM practitioner.

(Six Healing Sounds)

Transform negative emotions to positive emotions.

By Mantak Chia, Universal Healing Tao Center

Lung

The Lung sound is a metal sound. It sounds like the vibration of a bell and activates the lung Chi.

Sound: **Sssssss** (Tongue behind Teeth)

Color: White

Emotions: Grief and Sadness

Virtues: Courage and Righteousness

Associated Organ: Large Intestine

Senses: Smell (Nose) and Touch (Skin)

Element: Metal

Season: Fall



Kidney

The Kidney sound is a water sound and it activates the kidney Chi.

Sound: **Chooooooooo** (As when blowing out a candle: lips forming an "O")

Color: Dark Blue

Emotion: Fear

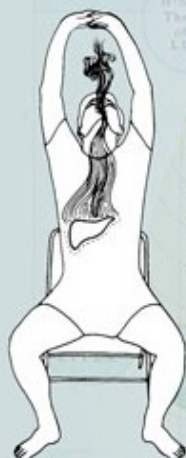
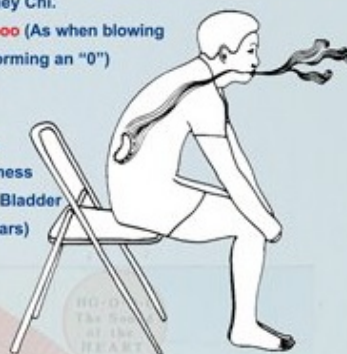
Virtue: Gentleness, Calmness and Stillness

Associated Organ: Bladder

Senses: Hearing (Ears)

Element: Water

Season: Winter



Liver

The Liver sound is a wood sound and it activates the liver Chi.

Sound: **Shhhhhhh** (Tongue near Palate)

Color: Green

Emotion: Anger

Virtue: Kindness

Associated Organ: Gall Bladder

Senses: Sight (Eyes)

Element: Wood

Season: Spring



Heart

The Heart sound is the fire sound and activates the heart energy.

Sound: **Hawwwwww** (Mouth wide Open)

Color: Red

Emotions: Hastiness, Arrogance, Cruelty

Virtues: Joy, Honor, Sincerity

Associated Organ: Small Intestine

Senses: Tongue, Speech

Element: Fire

Season: Summer

Spleen

The Spleen sound is the earth sound, activating the energy of the stomach, the pancreas, and the spleen.

Sound: **Whooooo** (From the Throat, Guttural)

Color: Yellow

Emotion: Worry

Virtues: Fairness, Openness

Associated Organs: Pancreas, Stomach

Senses: Taste (Lips, Mouth)

Element: Earth

Season: Indian Summer



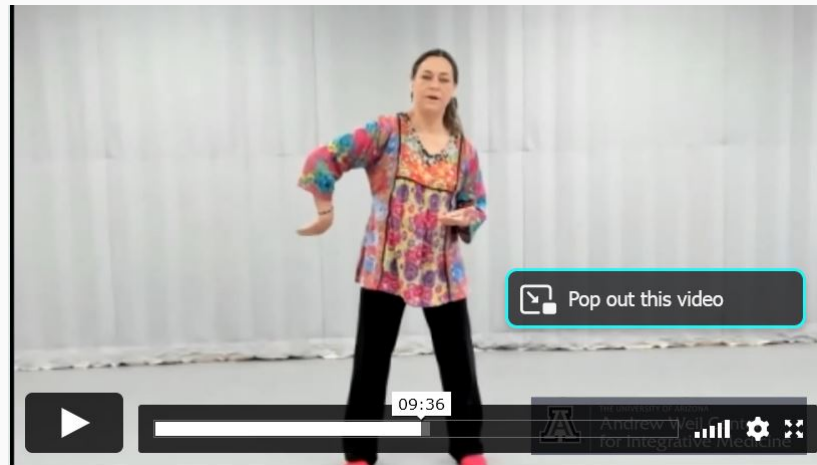
Triple Warmer

The Triple Warmer sound "**Heeoooo**" (From the Throat pass through upper and lower teeth). It serves to balance the temperature of the three levels by bringing hot energy down to the lower center and cold energy up to the higher center. Specifically, hot energy from the area of the heart is moved to the colder sexual region, and cold energy from the lower abdomen is moved up to the heart's region.



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Here is a short [Tai Chi demonstration](#) that provides a brief introduction to the practice, originally grounded in the martial arts, that connects you with the earth and sky, leading to a deep calm and centered awareness (scroll down to the second video).



WHAT CONDITIONS CAN TCM TREAT?

Acupuncture, perhaps the most visible and widely used Chinese medicine treatment in the West, can be effective for relieving chronic pain and other conditions. Studies have shown that treatments can relieve low-back pain, neck pain, osteoarthritis, knee pain, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Acupuncture can also relieve pain associated with tension headaches and may prevent migraine headaches, according to [NIH reviews](#) of study data. Other conditions such as seasonal allergies, treatment-induced nausea in cancer patients, asthma, and depression have shown promising responses to acupuncture. Western scientists theorize that the insertion of needles into muscles and connective tissues affect the nervous system and the tissues themselves. The needles may stimulate the body to produce natural painkillers, or may affect the regions of the brain that process pain. Some scientific studies, however, suggest that placebo effects may be taking place, suggesting that other “non-specific” factors such as the relationship between the patient and doctor or a belief in the practice are also at work.

Tai Chi has been shown to help prevent falls in older people, reduce chronic pain, and positively affect cognition in older adults. When used to treat cancer-related symptoms, Tai Chi has shown promising results in sleep quality, fatigue, and depression, leading to a higher quality of life. A small number of studies have also examined how Tai Chi has been used in the COVID-19 pandemic to combat the effects of isolation and sedentary lifestyles and improve the overall mental and physical health of participants. In particular, studies found that Tai chi improved the psycho-emotional state, cognition,

and motor learning in older adults. The practice can be done together outside, over video conferencing, or at home during isolation. The NIH produces an excellent [fact sheet](#) covering major scientific studies and the effectiveness of Tai Chi for a range of diseases and conditions.

Chinese Herbal Therapies have been used for both acute and chronic conditions for millennia, forming an integral pillar in the Chinese medical system. The Chinese *Materia Medica*, a compendium of information about thousands of herbs, minerals, and extracts, guides physicians in treating patients. Like other TCM treatments, herbal therapy is given after careful diagnosis and with the aim of aiding in rebalancing the system or strengthening immunity. The [Cleveland Clinic fact sheet](#) on Chinese herbs lists the following conditions for which herbs are used:

- Decrease cold/flu symptoms
- Increase your energy
- Improve your breathing
- Improve digestion
- Improve your sleep
- Decrease pain
- Improve menopausal symptoms
- Help regulate menstrual cycles if infertility is an issue

There has been some concern around impurities and contaminants in traditional Chinese herbs. As always when taking a new drug or herbal supplement, consult with a physician about interactions with other drugs you may be taking and check the source of the product to ensure high quality.

TCM AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Earlier this year, The World Health Organization convened an [Expert Meeting on Evaluation of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Treatment of COVID-19](#), held virtually from February 28 to March 2, 2022.

Experts from China and around the world discussed the use of TCM to treat COVID-19 from the early days of the pandemic. In China, the government has sponsored the creation of three medicines specially formulated to treat various strains of COVID-19. Public health officials responding to the pandemic took an integrative approach, using both TCM and modern treatments with patients. TCM was used in all phases of response, from prevention, to treatment of mild and severe disease, to recovery after infection. In various studies, Chinese researchers showed that TCM formulations helped shorten disease duration and prevented the progression of the disease from mild to severe (see p. 8 of the Meeting Report).



ALL OF US RESEARCH PROGRAM

Traditional Chinese Medicine and other healthy Asian lifestyle choices will be included in a major US study aimed at gathering data from more than 1 million Americans. The Tucson Chinese Cultural Center (TCC) has become a partner in the [*All of Us*](#) Research Program (AoUSRP) as a regional partner in the [Asian Engagement and Recruitment Core](#) (ARC).

AoUSRP is a national campaign funded by the National Institutes of Health to improve the health of all Americans through a data-gathering and outreach program that will reach residents from diverse backgrounds. Researchers will be examining the intersection of three health factors: environment, lifestyle, and biology. The mission of the ARC is to form a national infrastructure of culturally tailored materials and practices to educate and engage Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders for the AoUSRP.

TCCC is in the process of developing a set of events in 2022-23 to highlight healthy Asian ways of living. Check out their website at [Tucson Chinese Cultural Center](#) for upcoming events and demonstrations.

Recommended Reading/Resources

Books

[Chinese Materia Medica: Chemistry, Pharmacology and](#)

[Applications](#), You-Ping Zhu, Ph.D.

[Power of the Five Elements: The Chinese Medicine Path to Healthy Aging and Stress Resistance](#), Charles A. Moss, M.D.

[The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine](#), Ted J. Kaptchuk, O.M.D.

Articles

[“The integral role of self-care in advancing UHC,”](#) Dr. Zhang Qi and Judy Stenmark

[“Traditional Chinese Medicine,”](#) Andrew Weil, M.D. website

Institutions

[Beijing University of Chinese Medicine](#)

[Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine](#)

[Arizona School of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine \(ASAOM\)](#)

[UA International Study Abroad TCM Course Chinese Medicine Foundations](#)



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We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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