Chapter 2
Basic Theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Introduction

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a unique, complete medical system arising from a living tradition of literate scholarship that spans at least 2,000 years. Well structured and resting upon a solid, coherent theoretical basis, TCM provides an integral framework for understanding, interpreting, and organizing interventions in the human health-disease process. Over the course of its long history, TCM in various forms has been the main form of health care in China and many other countries in Asia. Its theories and techniques are studied and practiced alongside Western biomedicine in countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and mainland China, and it has become one of the main forms of alternative medicine in North America and Europe.

TCM views the human being as standing in intimate relation to its natural environment. In fact, this relationship is considered a key element in the health of the individual. Disease is understood to be a deviation from natural conditions, which correspond with changes in the natural environment. TCM thus describes diseases as being caused by wind, cold, dampness, heat, and so on, while the internal functions of the body are grouped together according to perceived systemic relationships. What these descriptions point to are clusters of related phenomena in the body, which occur together and can be treated with specific interventions, i.e., acupuncture, herbal therapy, and so on.

The importance of these theories for the application of acupuncture and herbal therapy cannot be underrated. Unlike Western biomedicine, which focuses on structural changes in the body and alterations in the chemical composition of blood and other tissues, the emphasis of TCM theory is in alterations of function. In order to manifest the full therapeutic potential of TCM, the patients and their conditions...
need to be analyzed through the lens of this system. In our experience, this not only optimizes the applicability of TCM-based therapies, such as acupuncture and herbal medicine, but also complements the highly specific approach of Western biomedicine, thereby providing superior health care and optimal clinical results.

**Basic Theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine**

TCM theory in its present form arose from the naturalistic philosophies of ancient China, influenced and expanded upon by the accumulated clinical experience of generations of literate scholar practitioners. It is because of this cultural context that TCM theory can at times seem abstruse or outdated. However, it represents a complete, integrated method of interpreting human physiology and responding to pathological changes in the body [1].

The most important concepts taken from ancient Chinese naturalistic philosophy in TCM are those of *qi*, *yinyang*, and the five phases (*wuxing*). Theoretical concepts specific to TCM include the doctrine of *zheng ti guang nian*, the concepts of the viscera and bowels (*zangfu xue shuo*), channels and networks (*jingluo*), body substances (*qi*, blood, essence and body fluids *qi xue jing jinye*); and pathogenic agents (*bing yin*). These theories, together with the methodologies of the four (diagnostic) methods (*si zhen*) and pattern discrimination (*bian zheng*) comprise the theoretical framework of TCM. Each of the therapeutic tools of TCM, including acupuncture and moxibustion (*zhenjiu*), Chinese herbology (*zhongyao fang*), and Chinese therapeutic massage (*zhongyi tuina*) rest upon this theoretical basis [2–7].

**Yinyang Theory (yinyang xue shuo)**

*Yinyang* theory expresses a universal standard of quality that describes two complementary, opposite aspects of an indivisible whole (Fig. 2.1). It is used to describe function and relationship of these aspects as part of a continuous process of transformation and change in the universe. Applied to medicine, *yinyang* theory is used to compare and contrast, and thus differentiate, physiological and pathological phenomena.
Yin is associated to qualities such as cold, rest, responsiveness, passivity, darkness, structure, the interior, downward and inward motion, and decrease. By contrast, yang is associated with heat, stimulation, movement, activity, light, the exterior, upward and outward motion, and increase. It is important to observe that these aspects occur only in relation to each other (i.e., cold can be defined only by the knowledge of heat, darkness by the presence or absence of light, and so on). In medicine, yin-yang theory would be applied to opposites such as structure (yin) and function (yang), the lower body (yin) in relation to the upper body (yang); however, the concepts of yin-yang are never absolute. They are applied to given objects in order to express their relation to other objects, actions, or processes.

Yin-yang theory has four fundamental characteristics, known as the four relations of yin-yang:
1. Opposition
2. Interdependence, interdivisibility, and relativity
3. Inter-consuming-supporting
4. Intertransforming

Opposition

As previously mentioned, yin-yang theory describes a universal qualitative standard. One of the key aspects of this is that the yin aspect of something exists only in opposition to its yang aspect. Heaven and earth, sun and moon, night and day, male and female, up and down, inside and outside, and quiescence and movement are manifestations of a duality intrinsic to the universe. Water is cold and fire is hot, and water flows downward while fire tends to rise. Therefore, water is yin and fire is yang. Similarly, day is yang and night is yin, high is yang and low is yin, matter is yin and energy is yang, and the passive element is yin and the active element is yang.

In terms of medicine, the upper body is yang in relation to the lower body, which is yin. However, the anterior side of the body is yin while the posterior side is yang. The medial aspect of the extremities is yin while the lateral aspect is yang. As a whole, the interior of the body is yin while the exterior is yang. Within the interior of the body, the zang organs (sometimes called “viscera”), considered “solid” and in charge of storage, are yin, whereas the fu organs (sometimes referred to as “bowels”) are held to be “hollow” and in charge of discharging their contents, and thus are yang. Diseases that manifest signs and symptoms associated with heat and excessive metabolic activity are yang, whereas diseases that display cold signs and a decrease in activity are yin. Rapid, replete, forceful pulses are yang, whereas slow, vacuous, and forceless are yin. Medicinal substances are classified as hot or warm (yang) and cool or cold (yin). As previously mentioned, overall yin refers to structure and form in the body, as opposed to function and metabolic activity, which are yang (Table 2.1).
Interdependence

_Yin_ and _yang_ define aspects of a whole, and therefore, they depend on each other. The whole is defined by the existence of the two opposing aspects. “Cold” cannot be defined without “heat,” “above” is meaningless without “below,” and “exterior” and “interior” mutually define each other. This is all in relation to a whole that contains these two parts.

In medicine, the clearest example of _yinyang_ interdependence is the relationship between structure and function. Structure (or form) pertains to _yin_, and function to _yang_. Together, they are complementary aspects of the whole that is the living body. Sufficient substance (structure) in the form of body fluids, healthy tissue, etc., allows for normal function. In turn, only when the functional processes are in good condition can the essential substances be appropriately replenished. The balance between structure and function is the basis for healthy physiological activity.

**Interdivisibility and Relativity** Because _yinyang_ are aspects of the whole, no object, phenomenon, event, or situation can ever be labeled as purely or wholly _yin_ or _yang_. Phenomena in the universe have _yin_ and _yang_ aspects, depending on the

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**Table 2.1** Basic _yinyang_ correspondences used in TCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>Exterior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>Rapid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passivity</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiescence</td>
<td>Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower position or downward direction</td>
<td>Upper position or upward direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior position or inward direction</td>
<td>Exterior position or outward direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimness</td>
<td>Brightness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibition</td>
<td>Excitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypoactivity</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal organs</td>
<td>Body surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Zang</em> organs</td>
<td><em>Fu</em> organs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower body, below the waist</td>
<td>Upper body, above the waist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anterior region</td>
<td>Posterior region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medial aspect of the limbs</td>
<td>Lateral aspect of the limbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right side</td>
<td>Left side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qi</td>
<td>Blood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
viewpoint of analysis. For example, day is considered yang when compared with night, but the early hours of the day (before noon) are yang when compared with the hours after noon, which are yin. In Chinese thought, it is said that the morning is yang within yang, and the afternoon is yin within yang. These hierarchies of yin and yang can be extended ad infinitum, as each separate phenomenon can be divided into its yin and yang aspect.

**Inter-consuming-supporting**

In yinyang theory, a gain, growth, or advance of one aspect of the whole means a loss, decline, or retreat of the other (this is sometimes referred to as “the waxing and waning” of yin and yang). Under normal conditions, this consumption/support occurs within limits. In terms of physiology, it could be likened to homeostasis. Exceeding these limits results in dysfunction and disease, but here, too, we may see the consumption of one by the other. A yang disorder, with an excess of metabolic activity, will gradually consume the resources (yin) of the body. Conversely, cold congelation or advanced age (yin) can bring about a drastic reduction of body function (yang). In terms of pathology, all diseases can be thought of as pertaining to one of four imbalances along these lines: excess of yang, excess of yin, deficiency of yang, or deficiency of yin.

**Intertransformation**

This back and forth between yin and yang implies a characteristic of constant motion and transformation, which is observed in the world. Yin transforms into yang, and yang in turn evolves into yin. The yang day transforms into the yin night, just like shadows moving across the face of a mountain as the sun travels across the horizon.

In terms of medicine, the intertransformation of yinyang can be said to occur in two ways: harmoniously, as in the natural course of development, growth, aging, and death, and deviating from the norm, as in response to drastic environmental changes or internal imbalance. Normally, yin and yang follow each other naturally, and this constant transformation is the source of life as we observe it. We could call this smooth, successive process as “health.” In disease, this process is disrupted and yin and yang are out of balance—an excess of one, which automatically presupposes a deficiency of the other. This can continue to the point where intertransformation occurs, but as a progression of disease. Chinese medical thought holds that “when the exuberance of yin reaches and extreme, it will transform into yang; when heat blazes, it transforms into cold.” This is observable when, for example, a very high fever (which would be a yang disorder) causes shock with hypothermia, loss of consciousness, etc. (yin symptoms).
Application in Traditional Chinese Medicine

*yin-yang* theory permeates every aspect of TCM. As can be seen from the examples given above, it is used as a framework to understand anatomy, physiology, pathology, diagnosis, and treatment. Its importance cannot be overrated.

*Five-Phase (wuxing) Theory*

Five-phase theory establishes a system of correspondences that groups phenomena in the universe into five categories. These categories represent tendencies of movement and transformation in the universe, and are associated with the natural phenomena of wood (*mu*), fire (*huo*), earth (*tu*), metal (*jin*), and water (*shui*). Clear, constant relationships between them are used to explain changes in nature.

*Five-Phase Categorization*

Each of the phases represents a category of related functions and qualities. Wood is associated with the season of spring, sprouting, early growth, awakening, morning, childhood, and the penetrating, powerful impetus of new life, anger, and wind. Fire is associated with summer. It represents a maximum state of activity, flourishing, exuberant growth, outward motion, high noon, and the expansive movement of happiness and open flame. Earth is associated with the long summer (or the transition between seasons). It signals balance and equilibrium, the early afternoon, nourishment, abundance, the quiet of pensiveness and worry, and dampness. Metal is associated with the autumn season, declining function, a movement toward crystallization and shedding that is not needed, dusk, clarity and sadness, and dry weather. Water is associated with winter. It expresses a state of downward motion, accumulation, rest, nighttime, and the development of new potential, the concentration of willpower and fear, and the cold.

Five phase correspondences permeate all aspects of classical thought in China. The five-way categorization is applied to colors, sounds, odors, flavors, emotions, animals, the planets, and ultimately everything in the universe (see Table 2.2).

*Relationships Between the Five Phases*

The five phases succeed each other in cycles, acting upon each other in fixed ways. Two cyclical relationships are held to exist among the five phases: an engendering (*sheng*) cycle and a controlling (*ke*) cycle. Both of these cycles are deemed to be natural and necessary. Without engenderment, there is no life; without control, things become excessive.
**Engendering Cycle**  This is the cycle whereby the phases are believed to proceed in order to generate each other in an orderly sequence. The natural action or movement of one phase fosters the growth or waxing of the next, thus wood engenders fire, fire engenders earth, earth engenders metal, metal engenders water, and water engenders wood. This cycle is also known as the “Mother-Son” relationship, with the engendering phase acting as “mother” to the next (the “son”).

**Controlling Cycle**  This cycle follows the sequence in which the phases suppress, control, or inhibit each other. In this sequence, wood controls earth, earth controls water, water controls fire, fire controls metal, and metal controls wood.
Thus, all phases stand in relationship to the others in one of the four ways: en-gendering, being engendered, controlling, and being controlled. It follows that the state of one phase in the system is always dependent on the condition of the others. If viewed as aspects of an organic whole, the actions of control and engenderment exerted by each of the phases add up to maintain a dynamic balance (Fig. 2.2).

**Five-Phase Theory in Traditional Chinese Medicine**

As can be seen from Table 2.2, five-phase correspondences exist in TCM as well. The viscera (zang) and bowels (fu), along with the acupuncture channels, are classified in this system. Five-phase theory is also used to interpret the physiology and pathology of the human body in relation to the natural environment. It is likewise applied to etiology, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis.

The main five-phase correspondences used in TCM are those of the zang organs: wood is attributed to the liver, which regulates free flow of qi; fire is attributed to the heart, which promotes the warming of the whole body; earth is attributed to the spleen, which is in charge of the transportation and transformation of food; metal is attributed to the lung, which promotes the descending of qi; and water is attributed to the kidney, which is responsible for the storage of essence and regulating body fluids. The basic engendering and controlling relationships of the five phases are interpreted as follows in physiology:
Engendering Cycle

- Wood engenders fire: the liver stores blood and supplements the blood to be regulated by the heart.
- Fire engenders earth: the heart provides warmth, which is indispensable for the spleen to function.
- Earth engenders metal: the spleen transforms and transports the essential nutrients and sends them up to replenish the lung and support its activity.
- Metal engenders water: the lung, with its clearing and descending functions, sends down yin fluids to the kidneys.
- Water engenders wood: Kidney essence nourishes liver blood.

Controlling Cycle

- Wood controls earth: The liver’s dredging effect prevents spleen qi from becoming stagnant.
- Fire controls metal: The upward and outward movement of heart fire prevents lung qi from descending excessively.
- Earth controls water: The action of transportation of the spleen prevents the fluids controlled by the kidney from overflowing.
- Metal controls wood: The clearing and descending action of the lung counteracts the ascent of liver qi.
- Water controls fire: Kidney yin flows upward to nourish heart yin, thus restricting heart yang.

Five-Phase Theory in Disease Causation

The engendering and controlling cycles of the five phases are used to explain disease causation, mainly through the “Mother-Son” relationship. In addition, a condition of excess or deficiency in one of the organs can affect other organs by altering the relationships of engenderment and control (see later).

Disease Causation Through the “Mother-Son” Relationship

- Disease of the Mother affecting the Son: If the Mother becomes deficient, it will be unable to nourish the Son, and will eventually cause a deficiency of the Son. For example, a deficiency of the kidney essence (water) will negatively impact the production of liver blood (wood), gradually inducing a condition of liver deficiency. Conversely, if the Mother is affected by an excess condition, this may cause the Son to become excessive as well. For example, if liver fire (wood) flares upward, it will cause heart fire (fire) to become exuberant, leading to an overabundance of fire in the liver and heart.
- Disease of the Son affecting the Mother: In most cases, a disease of the Son will induce a deficiency of the Mother. For example, a deficiency of kidney yin can induce a deficiency of lung yin, leading to deficiency of both organs. This is explained as due to the increased supply from the Mother to the deficient Son eventually exhausting the resources of the Mother.
Disease Causation Through Deficiency or Excess of an Organ

- Deficiency of one of the organs can induce any of the following scenarios:
  - Deficiency of the Son due to reduction of nourishment
  - Deficiency of the Mother due to increased demand for nourishment
  - Overcontrolling from its controller, which would aggravate the deficiency
  - Counter-domination by its controlled organ

- Excess of one of the organs can result in any of the following:
  - Excess of the Son
  - Excess of the Mother
  - Over-controlling of its controlled organ, causing debilitation of the latter
  - Counter-domination of its controlling organ, causing its debilitation

Five Phases in Diagnosis and Analysis of Symptoms

It is important to point out that although five-phase correspondences exist for many diagnostic signs (see Table 2.2), in actual clinical practice, these findings need to be correlated to the entire diagnostic picture developed through the use of the four methods. In all cases, TCM needs to correlate a large amount of concurrent data in order to arrive at a diagnosis and, in this context, the actual relevance or meaning of any one sign or symptom may vary when analyzed in relation to the whole.

That being said, certain signs, such as facial complexion, odor, tone of voice, etc., can be used as indicators of disease or pathology affecting the corresponding viscus per five-phase theory, or the associated Mother-organ or Son-organ. This can, in some cases, be used also to construct an entire therapeutic strategy according to the five-phase engendering and controlling cycles, as will be explained in the next section.

Five Phases in Therapeutics

As we have seen, disease of one viscus may affect other viscera according to the engendering and controlling cycles of the five phases. Therefore, certain pathological conditions are deemed to be the result of an imbalance between two or more viscera, as opposed to only the imbalance of one viscus. This is borne out in clinical practice by the clusters of associated symptoms and signs that often occur together, and which are associated with specific conditions in TCM diagnostic theory.

It follows that treatment should focus on regulating these relationships. In some cases, this means to treat the affected organ/phase system. However, a therapeutic strategy using the Mother-Son relationship is considered very effective. As the adage goes, “In case of deficiency, tonify the Mother; in case of excess, drain the Son.” There are common examples of this in clinical practice (such as tonifying kidney yin in order to help resolve a deficiency of liver blood), but the majority of five-phase-based treatment strategies used in modern TCM practice involve the use of a special group of acupuncture points known as the transport-shu points.
Each of the acupuncture channels is associated with either a viscus or a bowel, and with one of the five phases. In addition, each of the channels has five points, located in its most distal locations, which are associated with the five phases (Tables 2.3 and 2.4). Treatment using the transport-shu points follows the Mother-Son law. The point associated with the Mother of the affected viscus or bowel is tonified in cases of deficiency, or the point associated with the Son is drained in case of excess (Table 2.5). Sometimes, the corresponding point on the Mother-channel or Son-channel is also used (see Tables 2.6 and 2.7).

### Theory of the Viscera and Bowels (Zangfu)

Traditional Chinese medical theory describes physiology as a system of functional spheres of influence, known as the zangfu. Loosely correlated to the anatomical structures described by Western biomedicine, the “organs” of Chinese medicine interact with one another, and with inputs from the exterior, in predictable, organized ways that constitute the normal activity of the system. Changes and deviations in zangfu function can be observed from exterior manifestations, which constitute patterns of disharmony, i.e., disease. At the core of the system are the five zang (visceras): lung, heart, liver, spleen, and kidney. All of the other tissues of the body, including sense organs, connective tissues, fluids, excretions, and the six fu (bowels: large intestine, small intestine, gallbladder, stomach, bladder, and the Sanjiao) are seen as subordinated to the zang, which thus represent entire systems of related function. These organ systems are at the core of TCM practice. Diagnosis and treatment all refer there and are ultimately directed toward one or more of the zangfu [8].

### Table 2.3 The five transport-shu points of the yang channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Jing-Well (metal)</th>
<th>Ying-Spring (water)</th>
<th>Shu-Stream (wood)</th>
<th>Jing-River (fire)</th>
<th>He-Sea (earth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallbladder (wood)</td>
<td>Zuqiaoyin GB 44</td>
<td>Xiai GB 43</td>
<td>Zulinqi GB 41</td>
<td>Yangfu GB 38</td>
<td>Yanglingquan GB 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine (fire)</td>
<td>Shaoze SI 1</td>
<td>Qiangu SI 2</td>
<td>Houxi SI 3</td>
<td>Yanggu SI 5</td>
<td>Xiaohai SI 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjiao (fire)</td>
<td>Guanchong SJ 1</td>
<td>Yemen SJ 2</td>
<td>Zhongzhu SJ 3</td>
<td>Zhitou SJ 6</td>
<td>Tianjing SJ 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach (earth)</td>
<td>Lidui ST 45</td>
<td>Neiting ST 44</td>
<td>Xiang ST 43</td>
<td>Jiechi ST 41</td>
<td>Zusanli ST 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large intestine (metal)</td>
<td>Shangyang LI 1</td>
<td>Erjian LI 2</td>
<td>Sanjian LI 3</td>
<td>Yangxi LI 5</td>
<td>Quchi LI 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bladder (water)</td>
<td>Zhiyin BL 67</td>
<td>Zutonggu BL 66</td>
<td>Shugu BL 65</td>
<td>Kunlun BL 60</td>
<td>Weizhong BL 40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Basic Theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine
As previously explained (see Sect. Five Phase), the theory of the five phases assigns related phenomena into categories that express their “energetic” quality, or movement. These correspondences are used within zangfu theory to assign each organ a tissue, a sense organ, an “outgrowth” (usually refers to the accessory structures of the skin), a bodily secretion, a color, a flavor, and so on. These correspondences are then used in diagnosis to trace a given disease manifestation back to the affected organ system(s), and in treatment to select acupuncture points, medicinal substances, and other therapeutic tools to affect the condition from an organic, holistic perspective. Each of the organ systems, their correspondences, and areas of influence, will be discussed next [7–11].

### Table 2.4 The five transport-shu points of the yin channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Jing-Well (wood)</th>
<th>Ying-Spring (fire)</th>
<th>Shu-Stream (earth)</th>
<th>Jing-River (metal)</th>
<th>He-Sea (water)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liver (wood)</td>
<td>Dadun LR 1</td>
<td>Xingjian LR 2</td>
<td>Taichong LR 3</td>
<td>Zhongfeng LR 4</td>
<td>Ququan LR 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart (fire)</td>
<td>Shaochong HT 9</td>
<td>Shaofu HT 8</td>
<td>Shenmen HT 7</td>
<td>Lingdao HT 4</td>
<td>Shaohai HT 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pericardium (fire)</td>
<td>Zhongchong PC 9</td>
<td>Laogong PC 8</td>
<td>Daling PC 7</td>
<td>Jianshi PC 5</td>
<td>Quze PC 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen (earth)</td>
<td>Yinxian SP 9</td>
<td>Dadu SP 2</td>
<td>Taiyuan SP 3</td>
<td>Shangjiao SP 5</td>
<td>Yinlingquanshui SP 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung (metal)</td>
<td>Shaozhang Lu 1</td>
<td>Yuji LU 10</td>
<td>Taixu LU 9</td>
<td>Jingqu LU 8</td>
<td>Chize Lu 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney (water)</td>
<td>Yongquan KI 1</td>
<td>Rangu KI 2</td>
<td>Taixi KI 3</td>
<td>Fuli KI 7</td>
<td>Yinggu KI 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.5 “Mother-Son” points of the 12 regular channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Mother point (for tonification)</th>
<th>Son point (for dispersion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liver (wood)</td>
<td>Ququan (LR 8) (water)</td>
<td>Xingjian (LR 2) (fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart (fire)</td>
<td>Shaochong (HT 9) (wood)</td>
<td>Shenmen (HT 7) (earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pericardium (fire)</td>
<td>Zhongchong (PC 9) (wood)</td>
<td>Daling (PC 7) (earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen (earth)</td>
<td>Dadu (SP 2) (fire)</td>
<td>Shangjiao (SP 5) (metal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung (metal)</td>
<td>Taiyuan (LU 9) (earth)</td>
<td>Chize (LU 5) (water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney (water)</td>
<td>Fuli (KI 7) (metal)</td>
<td>Yongquan (KI 1) (wood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallbladder (wood)</td>
<td>Xiaxi (GB 43) (water)</td>
<td>Yangfu (GB 38) (fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Intestine (fire)</td>
<td>Houxi (SI 3) (wood)</td>
<td>Xiaohai (SI 8) (earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjiao (fire)</td>
<td>Zhongzhu (SJ 3) (wood)</td>
<td>Tianjing (SJ 10) (earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach (earth)</td>
<td>Jiexi (ST 41) (fire)</td>
<td>Liedui (ST 45) (metal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Intestine (metal)</td>
<td>Quchi (LI 11) (earth)</td>
<td>Erjian (LI 2) (water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary Bladder (water)</td>
<td>Zhiyin (UB 67) (metal)</td>
<td>Shugu (UB 65) (wood)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Lung (Fei)

The lung is associated with the metal phase. Its corresponding fu bowel is the large intestine, its tissue is the skin, its sense organ is the nose, its secretion is nasal mucus, and its outgrowth is the body hair. It is said to control the qi, exhalation, and the circulation of body fluids, especially in the upper body. It “descends and perfuses,” and is said to “face the hundred vessels”. In Biomedical terms, it comprises not only the ventilation function of the respiratory system, but also a part of the immune system, thermoregulation, and the opening and closing of the pores.

The lung is the zang located highest in the body (in the chest cavity, above the other organs), and is considered the most exterior of the zang. It absorbs the qi of air and transforms it into the qi that fuels bodily functions.

**Lung Pathology** Normal lung function permits the unobstructed circulation of qi, evidenced by even and harmonious breathing. A deficiency of lung qi manifests as feeble respiration, uneven breathing, weak speech, and lassitude. Normally, lung qi

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**Table 2.6 “Mother-Son” point combinations for deficiency and excess conditions of the yin channels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Affected channel (“Mother or Son Points”)</th>
<th>“Mother-Son Channel” (element points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lung (metal)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Taiyuan LU 9, earth of the metal channel</td>
<td>Taibai SP 3, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Chize LU 5, water of the metal channel</td>
<td>Yingu KI 10, water of the water channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart (fire)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Shaochong HT 9, wood of the fire channel</td>
<td>Dadun LR 1, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Shenmen HT 7, earth of the fire channel</td>
<td>Taibai SP 3, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pericardium</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Zhongchong PC 9, wood of the fire channel</td>
<td>Dadun LR 1, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(fire)</td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Daling PC 7, earth of the fire channel</td>
<td>Taibai SP 3, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen (earth)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Dadu SP 2, fire of the earth channel</td>
<td>Shaofu HT 8, fire of the fire channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Shangqiu SP 5, metal of the earth channel</td>
<td>Jingqu LU 8, metal of the metal channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney (water)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Fuliu KI 7, metal of the water channel</td>
<td>Jingqu LU 8, metal of the metal channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Yongquan KI 1, wood of the water channel</td>
<td>Dadun LR 1, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver (wood)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td>Ququan LR 8, water of the wood channel</td>
<td>Yingu KI 10, water of the water channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Xingjian LR 2, fire of the wood channel</td>
<td>Shaofu HT 8, fire of the fire channel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
descends. Loss of this function manifests as a replete sensation in the chest, cough, and shortness of breath. This may be caused by deficiency of lung *qi* or by obstruction caused by exterior pathogens attacking the body. The lung is also believed to maintain the body’s defenses by ensuring circulation of *qi* close to the surface of the body. Loss of this function is evidenced by symptoms such as aversion to cold, fever, nasal obstruction, nasal discharge, cough, and wheezing or shortness of breath. In severe cases, it may manifest as asthma. It may also cause dry skin and hair. Deficiency of lung *qi* can also cause spontaneous sweating, while an obstruction of the lung’s dispersing function will prevent sweating.

**The Heart (Xin)**

The heart is associated with the Fire phase. Its corresponding *fu* bowel is the small intestine, its tissue is the blood vessels, its sense organ is the tongue, its secretion is

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**Table 2.7 “Mother-Son” point combinations for deficiency and excess conditions of the yang channels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Affected channel (“Mother or Son Points”)</th>
<th>“Mother-Son Channel” (element points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large intestine (metal)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Quchi</em> LI 11, earth of the metal channel</td>
<td><em>Zusanli</em> ST 36, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Erjian</em> LI 2, water of the metal channel</td>
<td><em>Zutonggu</em> UB 66, water of the water channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Intestine (fire)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Houxi</em> SI 3, wood of the fire channel</td>
<td><em>Zuling</em> GB 41, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Xiaohai</em> SI 8, earth of the fire channel</td>
<td><em>Zusanli</em> ST 36, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjiao (fire)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Zhongzhu</em> SJ 3, wood of the fire channel</td>
<td><em>Zuling</em> UB 41, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Tianjing</em> SJ 10, earth of the fire channel</td>
<td><em>Zusanli</em> ST 36, earth of the earth channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach (earth)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Jiexi</em> ST 41, fire of the earth channel</td>
<td><em>Yanggu</em> SI 5, fire of the fire channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Lidui</em> ST 45, metal of the earth channel</td>
<td><em>Shangyang</em> LI 1, metal of the metal channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary bladder (water)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Zhiyin</em> UB 67, metal of the water channel</td>
<td><em>Shangyang</em> LI 1, metal of the metal channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Shugu</em> UB 65, wood of the water channel</td>
<td><em>Zuling</em> UB 41, wood of the wood channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallbladder (wood)</td>
<td>Deficiency</td>
<td><em>Xiaxi</em> UB 43, water of the wood channel</td>
<td><em>Zutonggu</em> UB 66, water of the water channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excess</td>
<td><em>Yangfu</em> UB 38, fire of the wood channel</td>
<td><em>Yanggu</em> SI 5, fire of the fire channel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sweat, and its outgrowth is the facial complexion. It controls the circulation of blood and is the seat of mental activity. It is referred to as the “Emperor” or “ruler” of all the zang. In biomedical terms, the concept of xin encompasses the heart, the circulatory system and all blood vessels, and many functions of the higher nervous system.

Heart Pathology  Deficiency of heart qi causes a feeble, weak pulse, or an irregular pulse, and a pale facial complexion. It can also cause stagnation of blood, which would then lend a bluish tint to the complexion and purplish coloration to the tongue. Deficiency of heart blood causes palpitations, insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, poor memory, and restlessness, with a pale tongue. If a heat pathogen enters the blood, it will cause delirium, coma, anxiety, and similar symptoms, as well as a stiff tongue.

The Liver (Gan)

The liver is associated with the wood phase. Its corresponding ji bowel is the gall-bladder, its tissue is the sinews (referring to the stiffer tissues of the joints and muscles, i.e., the continuum of periosteum, cartilage, tendon, fascial sheaths, and so on), its sense organ is the eyes, its secretion is tears, and its outgrowth is the nails. It is in charge of “coursing and discharging,” “the unimpeded flow of qi,” and “marshaling the blood,” i.e., it manages the body’s resources and the steady progression of all life processes. Because of this, the liver is also considered to be in charge of movement in the body and management of emotions. In biomedical terms, the TCM liver encompasses not only liver function but also emotional activities, volition, and autonomic muscle control.

Liver Pathology  Disruption of the liver’s command over blood can lead to hemorrhagic diseases, whereas deficiency of liver blood can manifest as vertigo, tremors or numbness of the extremities, or contracture or spasm of muscles and tendons, impairment of limb flexion and extension, scanty menstruation or absence of menstruation. Because the liver is in charge of managing the emotions as part of its coursing and discharging function, any affectation of the patient’s emotional state is understood as a disruption of liver function. Liver qi stagnation, probably the most common pattern of disharmony in TCM practice, manifests with a plethora of symptoms, including fullness of the chest, feelings of frustration, discomfort in the hypochondrium, agitation, sadness, depression, irregular menstruation, and so on. Liver function may also become excessive, manifesting as irritability, insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, dizziness, vertigo, ringing in the ears, or deafness. Any intense emotional upset, especially anger or mental depression, may impair the coursing and discharging function of the liver, leading to stagnation and any or all of the symptoms described above.

Liver function is intimately connected to the processes of digestion in TCM. Impairment of the free flow of qi readily affects the transportation and transformation functions of spleen and stomach (see below), causing jaundice, bitter taste in the mouth, distension and pain in the chest and hypochondrium, belching, and diarrhea.
Liver disharmony can also present with eye symptoms, including blurry vision, night blindness, or dryness. If a heat pathogen attacks the liver, redness, swelling, and pain of the eyes may result. Severe cases of this may also manifest with convulsions, opisthotonos, and lockjaw.

The Spleen (Pi)

The spleen is associated with the earth phase. Its associated fu bowel is the stomach, its tissue is the flesh (which refers to the cellular components of muscles, as opposed to the connective tissue membranes that make up the “sinews” that correspond to the liver), its sense organ is the mouth, its secretion is saliva, and its outgrowth is the lips. It is said to be in charge of “transportation and transformation,” referring to the functions of digestion and assimilation of nutrients, as well as distribution of the products of digestion to all tissues of the body. The spleen is also charged with controlling the blood, keeping it within the blood vessels, and with ensuring that all organs remain in their place within the body cavity. In Western biomedicine, this encompasses the functions of the digestive system, particularly those of the small intestine, pancreas, and the liver that pertain to metabolizing and assimilating nutrients.

Spleen Pathology Failure of the spleen’s function of transportation and transformation can manifest as abdominal distension, diarrhea, lassitude, emaciation, and malnutrition. Because this function controls the orderly movement of fluids inside the body, its deterioration can lead to the accumulation of pathological metabolites (known in TCM as tan yin) in the form of edema, watery diarrhea, or ascites. Easy bruising that takes a long time to heal, various types of internal bleeding, and frequent hemorrhages are signs of a breakdown of the spleen’s function of controlling the blood. Malnutrition, muscular atrophy, and weakness of the limbs are symptoms of a deficiency of the spleen, as well as loss of appetite and marked fatigue after eating.

The Kidney (Shen)

The kidney is associated with the water phase. Its associated fu bowel is the bladder. Its tissue is the bones, its sense organ is the ear, its secretion is the urine, and its outgrowth is the hair of the head. It is considered the most yin of the zang because of its location in the inferior regions of the body and its command over the “essential substance” of the body, called jing, and which refers to the genetic inheritance received at conception. Furthermore, the kidney in TCM is the seat of the “Fire of the Gate of Vitality,” that is, the original source of the motive force that propels all the body’s functions. As such, it is said to be “the source of the original (yuan) yin and yang” of the body, in charge of providing the other organs with the resources to perform their proper functions. It is considered to be in charge of the functions of growth, development, and reproduction, as well as assisting the lungs in inhalation. In addition to the bones, the marrow and the brain are associated with the kidney.
In biomedical terms, the TCM kidney encompasses the metabolic functions of the kidney, those of the urogenital system, as well as genetic inheritance, endocrine function (particularly the thyroid and the pituitary–adrenal and pituitary–gonadal axes), and the ventilation function of the diaphragm.

**Kidney Pathology** As we have seen before (Sect. Yinyang theory), there is a very strong dependence and close interaction between the yin and yang, i.e., the structure and function, of the body. These are believed to have a common source in the kidney, and kidney pathology refers mainly to a deficiency in either the structural or functional aspects of the body. Infertility, deficient infantile development, malformations, congenital diseases, and poor bone structure all point to a deficiency of structure, i.e., kidney yin. Other manifestations of deficiency of yin that involve the kidney include soreness, aching, and weakness of the lumbar region and knees, blurred vision, and poor memory. If the deficiency of kidney yin causes an excess of metabolic activity, there will be tidal fever, night sweating, dizziness, ringing of the ears, seminal emissions at night, and excessive dreaming. Notice how many of these symptoms are also associated with deficiency of blood (see Sect. The Liver). This is because the blood pertains to yin. Thus, the close relationship of all organ systems in TCM, and the interdependence of yinyang, can be seen in the body.

Conversely, kidney yang deficiency relates to deterioration in function, and manifests as lassitude, coldness, and pain in the lumbar region and the knees, cold extremities, frequent urination and enuresis, or scanty urination and retention of urine. It is the cause of pathological conditions such as inadequate reproductive ability, impotence, premature ejaculation, and coldness of the uterus. Uneven breathing, dyspnea, and asthma are signs of the kidney losing its function of “grasping the qi,” i.e., aiding respiration.

If either kidney yin or yang reaches a certain degree of depletion, it may injure the other and cause the physiological balance between structure and function in the body to be lost. Notice that in the absence of cold symptoms, kidney-related deterioration of function is sometimes called “kidney-qi” deficiency and symptoms of structural decay of the body associated with the kidney that do not also present heat symptoms are sometimes labeled as “kidney-essence” deficiency.

**The Uterus** The Uterus has a special status in TCM. It is considered an “extraordinary” fu organ, i.e., it is not associated with its own acupuncture channel, and although it is hollow like the rest of the fu, it stores blood temporarily and serves as the “palace of the fetus.” Because of its role in reproduction, it is associated with the kidney. Symptoms of uterine dysfunction (irregular menstruation, absence of menstruation, and infertility) are often considered to be kidney (or liver) pathology.

**The Six Fu**

In contrast with the zang, which are solid in structure and in charge of various functions of storage and construction, the fu are said to be hollow, and their functions relate to the passage of substances through the body (mostly food). An adage in TCM
goes, “The five zang store but do not drain; the six fu drain but do not store.” Proper function of the fu implies constant motion. Their pathology is frequently keyed to obstruction of the free passage by various pathogens.

Briefly, the six fu and their functions are as follows:

- The stomach (wei), considered the “chief” of the fu, is in charge of receiving the food we eat. Its function is called the “rotting and ripening” of food and pertains to the initial stages of digestion. It is associated with the spleen.
- The small intestine (xiao chang) is understood as being in charge of separating “the clear from the turbid” along with the large intestine (da chang), which also oversees the formation and expulsion of stool. Although associated with the heart and the lung, respectively, their functions are more relevant to those of the spleen and stomach.
- The gallbladder (dan) stores bile and participates in the liver’s coursing and discharging functions; in TCM, it is said to be associated with the capacity for resolve, decision-making, and taking action.
- The urinary bladder (pang guang) handles the expulsion of fluids managed by the kidney.
- The sanjiao is unique to TCM. Known as “the fu with function but no form,” it is believed to be the “triple furnace” where the functions of the rest of the zangfu take place. The organs are housed within the three chambers of the sanjiao (upper, middle, and lower). The sanjiao, along with the lung, spleen, and kidney, is also in charge of “the waterways” of the body, i.e., its function involves the transmission of fluids throughout the body.

Theory of Channels and Collaterals (jingluo xue shuo)

TCM holds that qi and blood circulate throughout the body in a network of vessels known as channels and collaterals (jingluo). These serve as the connection between the interior and the exterior of the body, binding together all its parts into an integrated whole. The jingluo form a circuit, connecting the zangfu to each other and the extremities, the head, and the surface of the body. Twelve main channels (jing) exist that are associated with each of the zangfu. It is along their trajectories that acupuncture points are located. Each of these main channels has a myofascial tract (traditionally referred to as “sinew channel,” jing jin), a deeper-lying “divergent” pathway (jing bie), and a collateral (luo) associated with it. In addition, deeper-lying vessels, known as the extraordinary vessels (qi jing ba mai), act as reservoirs for the twelve main channels, completing the system.

The twelve main channels receive a name according to their adscription to yin or yang (see Sect. Yinyang theory), their associated zang or fu, and the limb where their trajectory runs (arm or leg), as follows (presented in the order along which qi is said to proceed as it circulates through the body):

- Hand greater yin lung channel
- Hand yang brightness large intestine channel
• Foot yang brightness stomach channel
• Foot greater yin spleen channel
• Hand lesser yin heart channel
• Hand greater yang small intestine channel
• Foot greater yang bladder channel
• Foot lesser yin kidney channel
• Hand reverting yin pericardium channel
• Hand lesser yang sanjiao channel
• Foot lesser yang gallbladder channel
• Foot reverting yin liver channel

Among the eight extraordinary vessels, two deserve special mention because of their location along the midline of the body, along with the fact that they too have acupuncture points along their trajectory (the rest of the extraordinary vessels do not):

• The ren vessel
• The du vessel

Theory of Qi, Blood, Essence, and Body Fluids
(qi xue jing jinye xue shuo)

Qi, blood (xue), essence (jing), and body fluids (jinye) are collectively known as the vital substances, because life depends on their activity and their existence and function are dependent on the vitality of the organism. All changes that occur in the body throughout life are the result of the interaction of the vital substances. Zangfu theory posits that circulation of qi and blood through the channels and networks connects the internal organs with the more superficial tissues and the body as a whole with its surroundings, constituting a unified whole. The activity of the zangfu simultaneously consumes and regenerates the body’s stores of the vital substances.

The vital substances of TCM are a continuum, ranging from more to less substantial, underlying all of which is qi [12–15].

Qi

The concept of qi is one of the most pervasive in Chinese culture, yet translating the term into any other language is practically impossible. It has been explained as energy, material force, matter, ether, matter energy, life force, vital power, and moving power. Qi is fundamental and continuous and which exists as a result of the interaction between yin and yang since the beginning of the universe.

In TCM, qi is sometimes understood as a rarefied, metabolically active stuff that fills the vessels and propels blood and nourishes the body and fuels its vital activity. At others, it is the sum total of the system’s activities, or the normal, physiological function of an organ or tissue.
Qi as the rarefied stuff in the channels and networks is said to be produced by the body’s action on three sources: the essence (jing) received from the parents at conception and stored in the kidney, the “qi of grain and water” obtained by the spleen through the process of digestion, and the qi derived from the air breathed in through the lung.

The functions of this qi are as follows:

- To promote activity, growth, and development, fueling the activity of the zangfu and other tissues, propel the circulation of blood through the vessels and distribute fluids to all tissues.
- To warm the body and maintain normal body temperature.
- To protect the surface of the body against pathogens (xie qi). In this capacity, qi is known as upright qi (zheng qi), sometimes also referred to as “anti-pathogenic” qi.
- Stabilize and bind, ensure stability of the tissues and the proper position of all body structures, contain the blood within the vessels, and regulate loss of fluids, such as urine, sweat, saliva, and semen.
- Mobilize and transform. The constant motion of qi is described as “ascending, descending, exiting, and entering.” Normal physiology assumes harmonious movement in all directions. Its action ensures the production and correct consumption of blood, essence, and body fluids.

Original Qi (Yuan Qi) Original qi arises from the prenatal essence received at conception. It constitutes the original impetus of life and promotes normal activity in all organs and tissues. It is said to be the basis of resistance to disease and the extension of life into longevity. Its pathology relates mainly to chronic, debilitating disease, weakened zangfu function, premature aging, and reduced resistance to disease. It is circulated mainly through the sanjiao and the extraordinary vessels.

Chest Qi (Zong Qi) Chest qi is the result of the interaction between the qi acquired through respiration and the “qi of water and grain” obtained through digestion. It arises in the thorax, penetrates the heart vessels, and descends to pour into the lower limbs. Its main function is regulation of the activity of the lung and heart, and is responsible for appropriate circulation of qi and blood throughout the body. Chest qi also connects with the extraordinary vessel known as the thoroughfare (chong) to aid in providing the uterus with adequate blood supply to promote menstruation. Chest qi pathology relates mainly to lung disease, especially qi deficiency, as well as cardiovascular diseases, diseases of the peripheral circulation, pain in the chest, menstrual irregularities, and pain and weakness of the legs.

Nutritive Qi (Ying Qi) Nutritive qi is the result of the transformation of food. It circulates through the twelve regular channels and then enters the du and ren extraordinary vessels at the throat. It is the main kind of qi involved in transformation and production of blood. It is a constituent of blood and provides nourishment to the body. Its pathology relates mostly to diseases of the spleen and stomach, especially blood deficiency, spleen qi deficiency, and obstruction of qi and blood in the channels.
Defensive *Qi* (*Wei Qi*)  Also obtained from the “*qi* of water and grain,” defensive *qi* circulates outside the vessels. It is in charge of protection of the body at the surface, opening and closing of the pores, regulating body temperature, warming the body, and moistening the skin. Its action is said to relate to circadian rhythms and cycles of sleeping and waking. Its pathology pertains mostly to diseases caused by external pathogens, recurrent upper respiratory tract diseases, disorders of the skin, sweating, regulation of body temperature, and sleep disturbances.

Pathology of *Qi*

- *Qi* deficiency: respiratory diseases and decreased body resistance (lung), diseases of blood, digestive tract, and genitals (spleen), decreased immunity, and chronic and degenerative diseases (kidney)
- *Qi* sinking: prolapsed and chronic diarrhea (spleen)
- *Qi* stagnation: hepatobiliary, gastrointestinal, and genitourinary diseases, pain, tumors, emotional disorders (liver and spleen)
- *Qi* counterflow: nausea, vomiting, hiccup, belching, heartburn, acid reflux, cough, asthma, headache, vertigo, and so on (lung, liver, and stomach)

**Blood (Xue)**

Blood arises as a result of the transformation of food by the spleen, assisted by kidney essence. It flows constantly in the vessels, propelled by *qi*, and under the direction of the liver and the command of the heart. Its main functions are to nourish and lubricate, making sinew and bones strong and keeping the joints flexible. Blood is said to be the “Residence of the Mind,” i.e., the foundation for mental and emotional activity in the body.

Blood pathology pertains mainly to the spleen, liver, and heart, and is of one of three types: deficiency, stagnation, or heat. It may manifest as menstrual irregularities, painful menstruation, uterine fibroids, endometriosis, fixed, stabbing pains anywhere in the body, tumors, circulatory disorders, hemorrhagic diseases, poor memory, emotional disorders, dry and brittle nails, hair, skin, constipation, fatigue.

**Essence (Jing)**

Essence in TCM is a refined substance, initially received by the fetus at conception from the parents and then stored by the kidney and used as a resource for growth, development, and reproduction throughout life. This is called “prenatal” essence and is deemed to be a finite, irreplaceable resource. The functional activity of the *zangfu*, especially the spleen and stomach, creates and replenishes a secondary store of essence known as “postnatal” essence, which maintains life and fuels its processes. Kidney essence strengthens the bones, produces the bone marrow, and nourishes the brain. Essence pathology relates to hereditary diseases, developmental
disorders, and degenerative diseases, diseases of the brain, cerebrovascular system, reproductive organs, and bones, and disorders of the sense organs (especially the ears). Overindulgence in sexual activity is seen as damaging to the essence and can be the cause of deterioration in other systems as well.

**Body Fluids (Jinye)**

The term *jinye* refers collectively to all the fluids of the body other than blood and semen (which is considered part of *jing*, see Sect. Essence). It includes secretions, such as saliva, gastrointestinal juices, synovial fluid, tears, mucus, sweat, and urine.

*Jin* is the clearer, lighter, thinner, and less dense portion of bodily fluids. *Jin* fluids are *yang*, as compared with *ye* fluids (sometimes translated as “humors”) which are *yin*, i.e., more turbid, heavier, and denser. *Jin* fluids are relatively more watery and fluid and have functions relating to lubrication of skin and muscles and strengthening and nourishing of skin, akin to the defensive *qi* (Sect. Defensive *qi* (*wei qi*)). *Ye* humor, on the other hand, is said to be poured into the joints, brain, spinal cord, and sensory organs, which it lubricates and strengthens, in a way akin to the functions of nutritive *qi*.

Formation, distribution, and excretion of body fluids proceed from the digestion of food in the stomach and intestines. The essential fluids are absorbed and transported by the spleen to the chest, whereas the turbid waste is excreted with the feces. Essential fluid is then distributed by the action of the heart and lung to the organs and tissues of the body. The kidney excretes surplus fluid as urine, while the opening and closing of the pores allows fluids to escape the body in the form of sweat.

Body fluids accumulate because of diminished function of the organs in charge of fluid metabolism, i.e., lung, spleen, and kidney. Pathology of the body fluids includes deficiency caused by excessive consumption (by heat pathogens) or loss (sweating, diarrhea, polyuria, vomiting, or bleeding), and abnormalities in circulation, which give rise to phlegm-rheum (*tan yin*), stagnation, damp-turbidity, fluid retention, edema, and so on.

**Etiology and Pathophysiology in Traditional Chinese Medicine**

As has been emphasized, TCM has a unique way of looking at health and illness. It does not rely on animistic or magical explanations for disease causation, yet it also does not recognize the existence of pathogens the way Western biomedicine does. From a TCM perspective, the virus or bacterium is not the causative agent per se, but one of the intermediate contributing factors for development of disease. According to TCM theory, the fundamental factor in etiology is weakness of the body’s normal function, referred to as *zheng qi*. Once *zheng qi* has been weakened for whatever reason (sudden weather changes, emotional upsets, overexertion, poor
eating habits, and so on), particular conditions arise that manifest as dysfunction. Disease thus arises when the balance of the body’s processes (structure and function, qi and blood, zangfu, and the channel system) is lost. In lieu of this initial disharmony, says TCM theory, no disease can arise. The Neijing Suwen, the oldest extant text on TCM theory, says “Yin is calm, yang is hidden, therefore the spirit is at rest.” This condition of balance extends to the relationship between the body and its surrounding environment. Quoting from the Suwen again, “Yinyang of the four seasons are the beginning and end of all things, the root of life and death. To go against them damages life; to follow their course prevents the arisal of disease.” TCM thus classifies pathogenic factors according to their origin:

**Exogenous** Also known as “the six weather evils” (liu yin), these are wind (feng), cold (han), damp (shi), dryness (zao), summer heat (shu), and heat (re). Also classified in this category is pestilential qi (li qi), i.e., epidemic diseases.

**Endogenous** The “seven emotions” (qi qing) (anger, euphoria, worry, sadness, fear, melancholy, and fright) are said to adversely affect the flow of qi, thus giving rise to disharmony and disease.

**Miscellaneous** “Neither exogenous nor endogenous,” this category includes all aspects of a disorderly lifestyle, such as poor diet, binging and starving, fatigue due to physical or mental overexertion, and excessive sexual activity. It also includes traumatic injury, parasites, poisonous bites, poisoning, and incorrect medical treatment. There are also the so-called “secondary pathogenic factors, such as blood stasis (xue yu) and phlegm (tan), which arise as the result of the others, but which in turn cause or complicate disease conditions.

### Exogenous Pathogens: The Six Evils (Liu Yin/Liu Xie)

The exogenous pathogens are those that attack the body from the exterior and include the so called “six weather evils” and “pestilential qi.” The ancient Chinese sages observed the effects of exposure on the human body, and determined that six climactic conditions could affect the yinyang balance of the organism. These six influences, namely wind, cold, damp, dryness, summer heat, and heat, adversely affect health when they change suddenly and surpass the body’s capacity to adapt or when preexisting imbalance makes the body susceptible to their pathogenic effects. Put otherwise, these influences are part of nature. It is only when they occur abruptly or when the organism is already weakened that they become etiological factors.

Under certain circumstances, pathological changes can induce conditions that resemble the symptoms caused by the external pathogenic influences. In such cases, one speaks of “internal dampness,” “internal cold,” “internal heat,” “internal wind,” and so on.
Wind (*Feng*)

Wind is characterized by a sudden onset and quick subsidence, lesions that shift location, and/or aversion to drafts. When affecting the skin, wind diseases cause itching. Other wind disease symptoms may include involuntary movement (twitching, tremors, and convulsions) or the sensation of abnormal movement (vertigo and dizziness).

**Cold (*Han*)**

Cold diseases are characterized by sensations of chills and or cold, muscular contraction, and localized pain that worsens with exposure to cold.

**Dampness (*Shi*)**

Dampness is associated with lingering illness, heaviness of body and limbs, or headache that feels as if the head is tightly bound. There may be turbidity in body excretions, such as leucorrhea, turbid urine, and exudates from skin lesions. There can be sensations of fullness or distension in the abdomen, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and loose stools, and in some cases, accumulation of fluids in the body, as in edema.

**Dryness (*Zao*)**

Dryness manifests as dry mouth, dry nose, dry throat, and dry cough.

**Heat (*Re*)**

Heat manifests as fever, thirst, scanty concentrated urine, constipation, a red tongue with yellow or no coating, and a rapid pulse. There may also be low fever in the afternoon, sensation of heat in the palms and soles, malar flush, and night sweating.

**Fire (*Huo*)**

Fire represents a stronger degree of heat and can manifest as acute inflammation and localized redness, swelling, sensation of heat, and pain, fever, restlessness, thirst, foul breath, bitterness in the mouth, ulceration of the tongue, and constipation, bleeding (epistaxis, hematuria, and so on), and/or a dark red tongue with a yellow, prickly coating, and rapid replete pulse. Diseases caused by endogenous fire are similar to those caused by endogenous heat, but may be accompanied by irritability and insomnia.
Endogenous Pathogens: The Seven Emotions (qi qing)

TCM treats excessive or unbalanced emotions as disease-causing factors because, through the systemic correspondences of five-phase theory, they are directly related to the zangfu organ systems. Each of the five zang is keyed to one emotion (see Table 2.2). The emotions are held to directly affect the movement of qi in specific ways which, like the six evils, may become pathogenic under given circumstances.

Emotions are a natural part of human existence, and no human being is above experiencing them. Under normal circumstances, emotions occur in response to outside stimuli, produce an effect, and pass quickly. Emotions become the cause of disease only when they are intense, violent, or continue for long periods. This is sometimes termed “over-excitement of the emotions” in that the emotions exceed the adaptive, regulatory capability of the body. They can impair zangfu function, perturb the qi dynamic, and upset the yinyang balance, thus leading to the development of pathological conditions.

Because they are generated from within, emotions readily injure the zangfu. As previously mentioned, each of the emotions is keyed to one of the zang, which it said to injure directly when in excess: euphoria injures the heart, anger injures the liver, sadness injures the lung, worry injures the spleen, and fear and fright injure the kidney. In addition, those organ systems directly in charge of mental/emotional activity, i.e., the heart and the liver, are affected by all pathological affects. The liver is directly in charge of coursing and discharging the emotions; a deterioration of this function causes the emotions to become more extreme. On the other hand, because the heart is the seat of mental activities, impairment or obstruction of this function will cause mania and depression.

As previously mentioned, the emotions perturb the movement of qi. Each of the emotions causes qi to move in a particular way, disturbing the qi dynamic on which the body depends to maintain harmony and balance. The disturbances of qi flow brought on by the emotions are summarized in Table 2.8, and explained later.

Anger induces qi to flow upward: the liver is the zang most readily affected by anger. When this happens, liver qi flows upward in excess, causing blood to move pathologically in this direction as well. This will manifest as a red face and eyes, dizziness and vertigo, distending pain of the head, or even sudden coma or syncope. Sometimes, hematemesis and diarrhea may also be observed as a result of blood following the adverse upward qi flow or a counterflow that attacks the spleen.

Euphoria relaxes the flow of qi: euphoria is excessive joy. Under normal circumstances, joy is desirable in that it promotes the harmonious flow of qi and blood. However, taken to excess, it causes poor concentration and mania.

Sadness consumes qi: Affecting the lung and its command of breathing, sadness as a pathogenic factor manifests as chest oppression and a demoralized attitude. Crying and weeping exhaust the qi and cause lassitude.

Worry causes qi to accumulate: Discursive thought requires qi to become fixed. When it becomes lengthy or intense, thinking easily becomes worry and causes qi to stagnate. Worry most readily injures the spleen, and thus, the manifestations of injury by worry include poor appetite, abdominal distension, constipation, and/or diarrhea.
Fear causes qi to flow downward: Because the kidney is the zang in charge of urination and defecation, when fear injures it, there will be incontinence. Other manifestations include pain and weakness in the legs and knees as the function of the kidney to nourish the bones is impaired.

Fright causes qi to disperse: Sudden fear has the effect of causing the qi to collapse. This is seen as palpitations, anxiety or distress, and an inability to concentrate. Because emotional overexcitation causes a breakdown of the normal flow of qi, it will invariably cause stagnation. Over time, any obstruction or accumulation of qi leads to internal heat and fire. This is commonly seen in the clinic. Patients with long-term emotional problems usually display some of the symptoms associated with the fire pathogen (see previous section). Key diagnostic signs are a red or crimson, dry tongue, possibly with a swollen and red tip, and a rapid and/or slippery pulse.

By the same token, emotions may also worsen a preexisting disease through their alteration of the qi dynamic. For example, a patient with hypertension (a disease caused by excessive rising of liver yang due to deficiency of both kidney and liver yin) may suffer from sudden coma or syncope, or even paralysis, after an incident of sudden and violent rage. This is because the liver is readily affected by anger, and sudden anger will induce rising of liver yang.

Conversely, as body, mind, and emotions are an integral and indivisible unit, it is equally likely for the process to occur in reverse, i.e., instead of the emotions causing disease, an organic disturbance may cause alteration of the emotions. For example, a state of protracted fear and anxiety will damage and weaken the kidney. On the other hand, if there is a deficiency of the kidney, due to having had multiple pregnancies and childbirths, the condition may also manifest with abnormal states of fear and anxiety. Frequently, a vicious cycle is established, where the emotion will feed the organic imbalance, which, in turn, favors the imbalanced emotional state that worsens or aggravates it, such as when a liver imbalance makes a person irritable, which in turn aggravates the liver imbalance.

In summary, when thinking of the emotions as pathogenic influences, they are said to damage the interior and perturb the flow of qi of the zangfu. They arise and are keyed to the zangfu and, under normal circumstances, will cause no damage as they are depurated by the liver’s coursing and discharging. However, in excess, each of the emotions can affect one or more of the zangfu, causing pathological

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Effect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Qi ascends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphoria</td>
<td>Qi relaxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Qi accumulates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Qi consumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Qi descends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fright</td>
<td>Qi disperses and moves recklessly</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 2.8 Effect of the emotions on the movement of qi
changes. Conversely, pathological changes in one of the *zangfu* may make one more
prone to the emotion keyed to the affected organ system, which can create a vicious
cycle of reinforcing disease-causing conditions.

**Emotions in TCM and Psychosomatic Disease in Biomedicine**

Western biomedicine concerns itself with organic alterations that are keyed to the
physical structures of the interior of the body. When confronted with emotional
symptoms, biomedicine deems them as beyond its scope of diagnosis and treat-
ment. When symptoms are keyed to the patient’s emotional state and no clear or-
ganic alterations can be found, biomedicine labels these cases as “psychosomatic”
and refers them for psychiatric care. The unfortunate reality is that biomedicine
conceives the emotions as being separate from the body and dismisses emotional
manifestations as ultimately irrelevant to the origin, development, and outcome of
a disease process.

TCM, however, views the emotions as an integral part of what constitutes health.
Alterations of organ system function include the emotions, and a person is not un-
derstood to be healthy if their emotions are in an abnormal, imbalanced, or exces-
sive state. For example, if there is an imbalance of the spleen and stomach, symp-
toms such as diarrhea or constipation, vomiting, nausea, poor appetite, heartburn,
bloating, and abdominal pain will ensue, but these will likely be accompanied by
states of anguish, anxiety, worry, lassitude, heaviness of the head and difficulty
concentrating. Treatment would be aimed at correcting the spleen–stomach imbal-
ance as a whole, and the emotional states would be seen to disappear along with the
organic manifestations.

It is thereby clear how TCM theory embraces a holistic perspective. The body
is made up of a group of interrelated systems that stand in functional relationship
to each other in order to maintain balance and harmony. Each of these systems par-
takes of all dimensions of human experience (corporeal, emotional, mental) simulta-
nously, as part of a continuum. Alteration of function can have multiple manifesta-
tions, some at the emotional level, others at the physical, but they all pertain to the
same organ systems. The correlation of symptoms and signs occurring simultane-
ously is what allows for accurate diagnosis and, consequently, effective treatment.

**Miscellaneous Pathogenic Factors (Nonexternal/Noninternal)**

In addition to exogenous and endogenous pathogens, TCM recognizes other mecha-
nisms whereby disease may develop, mostly related to lifestyle. This category also
includes parasites, poisonous bites and substances, iatrogenic disease, and the so-
called “secondary pathogenic influences,” which are intermediate by-products of
dysfunction that, in turn, can cause characteristic disease states.
Lifestyle Factors

Proper diet, work, appropriate regular exercise, and rest are imperative for human life and preservation of health. Improper diet as well as imbalances in activity (including sexual activity) will disturb the physiological functions of the body, leading to disease.

Improper Diet Improper dietary habits include undereating and overeating, eating excessive amounts of “cold” and/or “hot” foods, and disorderly eating. Insufficient eating will lead to deficiencies of qi and blood. Additionally, the body’s zheng qi will be weakened from the lack of substance, making the body susceptible to invasion by exterior pathogens.

Overeating, in contrast, weakens the spleen and stomach, causing abdominal distension, epigastric pain, nausea, vomiting, burping, gastric reflux, and diarrhea. It may also induce food stagnation (indigestion) and, over time, malnutrition. It may also induce stagnation of blood and qi in the networks of the stomach and intestines, which manifests as bloody stools and/or bleeding hemorrhoids. Like all forms of stagnation, food stagnation that persists over time will transform into heat and subsequently into phlegm (see below).

Excessive consumption of sweet foods obstructs the transportation and transformation functions of the spleen, engendering internal dampness, which manifests as copious nasal discharge, abdominal distension and pain, mucus in the stool, and vaginal discharge. Excessive consumption of greasy, fatty foods such as deep-fried foods, dairy, bananas, peanuts, and fatty meats can also induce the formation of phlegm and dampness. These internal pathogens obstruct the spleen and cause sinusitis, nasal discharge, a sensation of heaviness in the body, dull pains, and a sensation of “fogginess” in the head.

TCM classifies foods (and medicinal substances) in terms of their “hot” or “cold” energetic quality. Raw vegetables and foods that are actually cold to the touch can injure the spleen and stomach, causing symptoms such as diarrhea, chills, cold phlegm, and abdominal distension and pain. On the other hand, rich, spicy, high-glycemic-index foods, and alcohol are considered hot and can cause stagnation and the appearance of internally generated heat in various points in the digestive tract.

Finally, eating in a hurry, arguing while eating, returning to work immediately after eating, late-night snacking, and eating while emotionally upset are all circumstances that injure the yin aspect of the stomach, manifesting as thirst, epigastric pain, and dry stools with a red tongue without coating in the center.

Imbalances Between Work and Rest Appropriate physical activity promotes the flow of qi and blood in the channels and strengthens the constitution. Proper rest relieves fatigue and restores mental and physical strength. However, excesses in either of these will disrupt the balance of the body and lead to disease.

Overexertion is activity; therefore, it pertains to yang. In excess, it injures the qi of kidney and spleen. Excessive mental work (akin to the worry emotion) readily damages the spleen, whereas excessive physical activity can damage the heart.
Conversely, excessive inactivity damages the flow of *qi* and blood and, over time, causes damage to the spleen and stomach, leading to generalized *qi* deficiency and the presence of dampness and phlegm, as in obesity.

**Excessive Sexual Activity:** A subjective condition to define, what constitutes “excessive” sexual activity is entirely dependent on the person’s lifestyle, age, and current situation. Young, healthy individuals can certainly engage in sexual activity more often and intensely than old, frail ones. Regardless, TCM theory recognizes signs that may be attributed to excessive sexual activity: fatigue, dizziness, blurred vision, painful and weak knees and lower back, frequent urination, reduced appetite, and reduced libido or erectile dysfunction in men. Sexual taxation damages primarily the kidney, as it is the *zang* associated with reproduction. This may manifest as seminal emission, impotence in men and menstrual irregularities in women, vaginal discharge, infertility, and frigidity. Also, because the kidney is the basis of the *jing*-essence acquired from the parents at conception, excessive sexual activity may induce premature aging or debility. Furthermore, sexual activity while exhausted or emotionally perturbed, or while intoxicated, will also damage the essence.

**Traumatic Injury**

According to TCM, traumatic injury causes localized stagnation of *qi* and blood. Even after a lesion has healed, localized weakening of the tissues surrounding the site of injury often remains, and pain and weakness of the area may occur again when old age, cold exposure, malnutrition, or further lesions weaken the flow of *qi* and blood in the area again. The category of trauma includes animal bites and burns.

**Parasites**

“Parasites” in TCM is an older disease category. It refers mostly to the presence of visible parasites, such as roundworm, ringworm, tapeworm, and the like.

**Iatrogenic Diseases**

Inadequate doses or wrongfully indicated pharmaceutical drugs can cause disease. Even when correctly indicated, pharmaceutical drugs can and frequently do have secondary side effects, which are covered under this category. Wrong diagnosis in the practice of TCM herbal medicine can also cause iatrogenic symptoms, although to a lesser degree and are easily corrected.
Secondary Pathogens

Disease in the body may lead to the appearance of pathological substances, which in turn become the cause of other symptoms. These are termed secondary or intermediate pathogens, and include qi stagnation (qi zhi), blood stasis (xue yu), and phlegm (tan).

- **Qi** stagnation is the cause of a variety of conditions marked by pain. A TCM adage states that “Wherever there is obstruction, there will be pain.” Pain attributed to qi stagnation is accompanied by distension and has no clear, fixed location. Qi stagnation may also be specific to one or more of the zangfu, perturbing their function directly.
- Blood stasis is considered the cause of a large number of pathological changes, chief of which is extravasation as the flow becomes impeded and blood escapes the vessels. Congestion, thrombosis, ischemia, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly, and many types of tumors are attributed to blood stasis as well. Blood stasis is also associated with pain; however, this pain is severe, stabbing, and sharp. The patient can easily pinpoint its location. Blood stasis conditions are evidenced by purplish colorations in the tongue and elsewhere in the body.
- Phlegm is a concept that deserves particular attention in TCM. The result of long-term stagnation and ensuing internal heat, a loss of the transformation function of the spleen and/or a breakdown of the kidney’s command of the turbid fluids of the body, phlegm in TCM encompasses more than just the turbid discharge of the nasal passages. It is the cause of “the hundred strange diseases,” and may manifest as vomiting, cough with dyspnea and expectoration, numbness, facial paralysis, enlargement of the lymph nodes, palpitations, shortness of breath, and even manic behavior and loss of consciousness.

References