

Chapter 3

Wǔ Xíng – the five phases

Goals of this chapter

Explain the concepts of the five phases.

Learning Goals

After this chapter you have to be able to:

- explain the concept of the five phases
- explain the relationships between the different phases
- explain the interactions between the different phases

Introduction

Wǔ means *five* and Xíng means *movement, process, phase, go to, behaviour*.

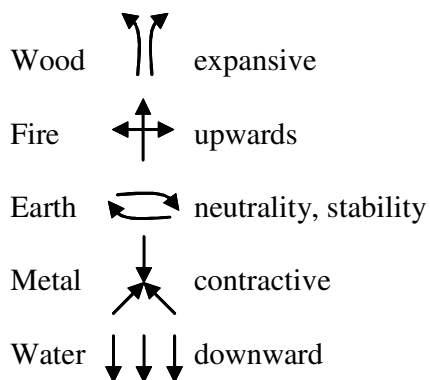
These five basic processes were particularly popular during the Warring States period (476-221 BC).

Assignment

Read page 15 – 34 of *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine* (G. Maciocia). Study the different models below and write in your own words what these models tell you.

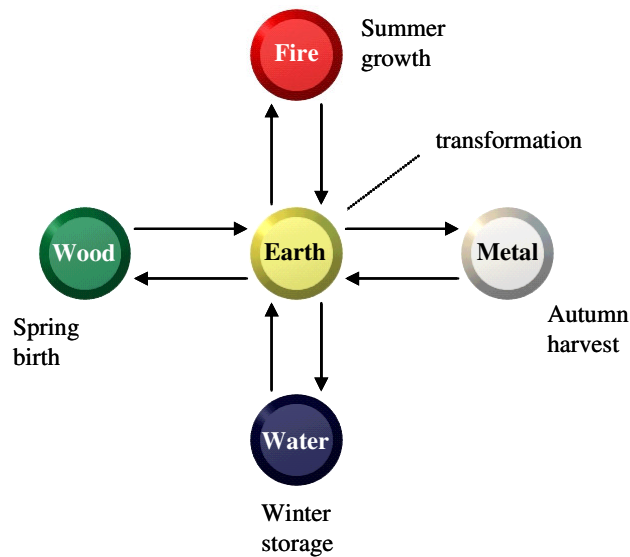
The Five Elements in Nature

The basic movements of the different phases are:



Stages of a seasonal cycle

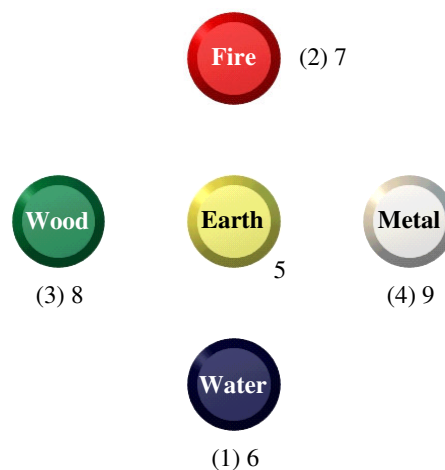
Towards the end of each season, the heavenly energies go back to the Earth for replenishment.



The Cosmological Relationship

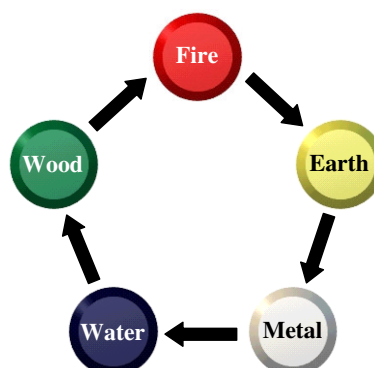
Water is the basis, the beginning of the cycle.

The order in which the phases are enumerated is closely related to their numerology.



Xiāng Shēng – Engendering Relationship

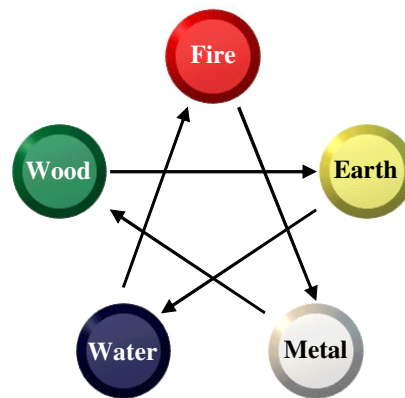
Each phase generates another and is generated by one, e.g. Wood is the Child of Water and the Mother of Fire.



Xiāng Kè – Restraining Relationship

Each Element controls another and is controlled by one.

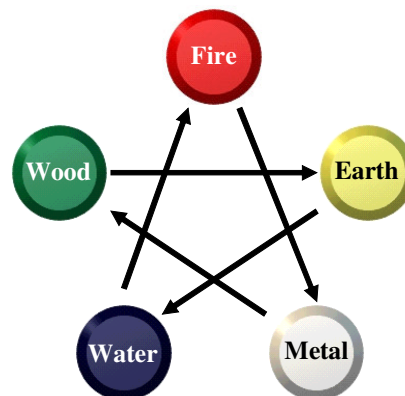
Interrelationships between Engendering and Restraining Sequence: a self-regulating balance is kept at all times.



Xiāng Chéng – Overwhelming Relationship

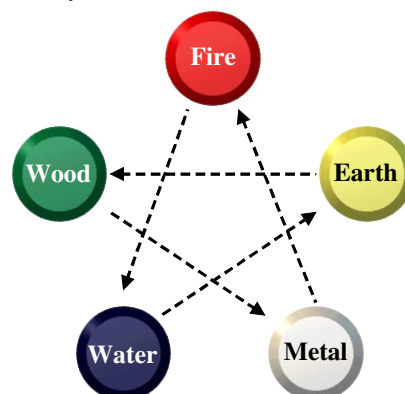
Same as Restraining relation, but each Element “over controls” another, so that it causes it to decrease. If a phase is weak, it can be completely overwhelmed by the other.

If Balance is broken → quantitative relationship breaks down.



Xiāng Wǔ – Rebellion Relationship

A reversal of the of the Restraining relationship. A phase is disproportionately strong and rebels against the phase that should normally restrain it.



Main correspondences of Wǔ Xíng

	Mù - Wood	Huǒ - Fire	Tǔ - Earth	Jīn - Metal	Shuǐ - Water
Colours	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black/Blue
Seasons	Spring	Summer	End of each season	Autumn	Winter
Tastes	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
Yīn organs	Gān	Xīn	Pí	Fèi	Shèn
Yáng organs	Dǎn	Xiǎo Cháng	Wèi	Dà Cháng	Páng Guāng
Sense organs	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Tissues	Sinews	Vessels	Muscles	Skin	Bones
Emotions	Anger	Joy	Pensiveness	Sadness	Fear
Climates	Wind	Heat	Dampness	Dryness	Cold
Sounds	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning
Fluids	Tears	Sweat	Drool	Spittle	Spittle
Entity	Ethereal soul	Spirit	Ideation	Animal soul	Mind

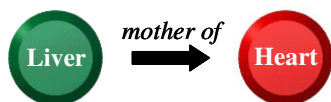
Wǔ Xíng in Physiology

Relationships among the organs are only a five-element model of relationships - the actual organ functions which the model itself is trying to represent.

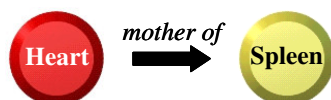
The model is a guideline for diagnosis and treatment and refers to clinical practice.

Not all relationships are equally meaningful as a model of organ-function interactions.

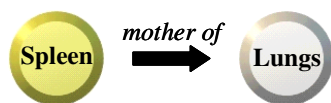
Xiāng Shēng – Engendering Relationship



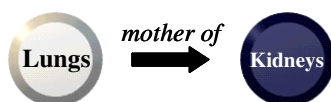
Gān - Liver stores Xuè and Xuè houses the Shén - Mind. If Gān-Xuè = weak, then Xīn - Heart will suffer.



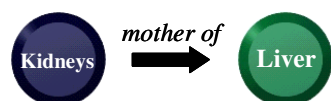
Xīn-Qì pushes Xuè, so it helps Pí function of transportation.



Pí-Qì provides Gǔ-Qì to Fèi where it interacts with air to form Zōng-Qì.



Fèi-Qì descends to meet Shèn-Qì. Fèi also sends fluids down to Shèn.



Shèn-Yīn nourishes Gān-Xuè.

Xiāng Kè – Restraining Relationship



Gān assists Wèi to rot and ripen food and assists Pí to transform and transport.
Gān controls Wèi as well.



Both in the Shàng Jiāo. Xīn governs Xuè, Fèi governs Qì. Qì and Xuè mutually assist and nourish each other.



Both transform body fluids. Pí activity in transforming and transporting fluids is essential to Shèn transformation and excretion of fluids.

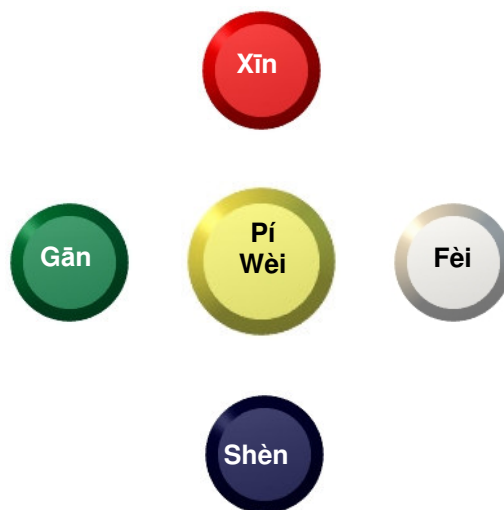


Fèi sends Qì downwards, Gān spreads Qì upward.
If Fèi-Qì = weak and cannot descend, then Gān-Qì may tend to rise too much causing rising of Gān-Yáng or stagnation of Gān-Qì (Gān-Qì zhì).



Xīn and Shèn assist and support each other.
See also the section below about the Cosmological Sequence.

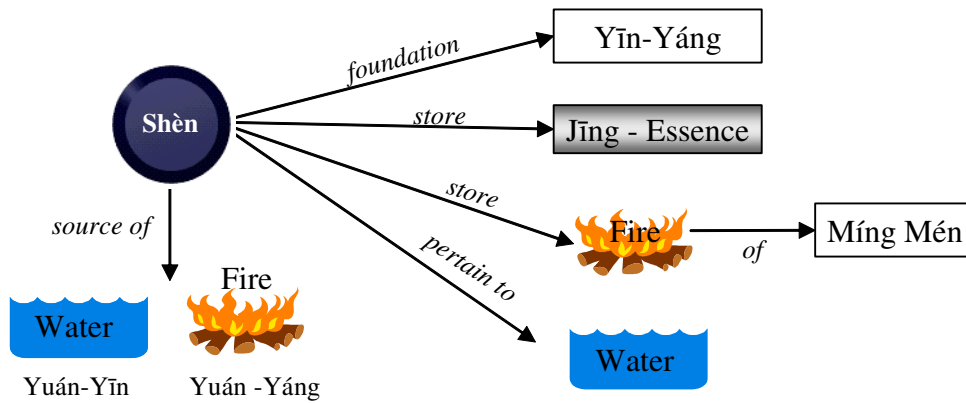
Cosmological Sequence



Water as the Foundation

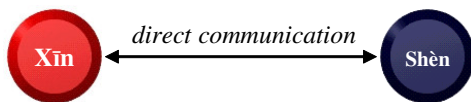
If Shèn-Yīn = deficient → deficiency of Gān-Yīn and Xīn-Yīn.

If Shèn-Yáng = deficient → deficiency of Pí-Yáng and Fèi-Qì.



Relationship Xīn-Heart and Shèn-Kidneys

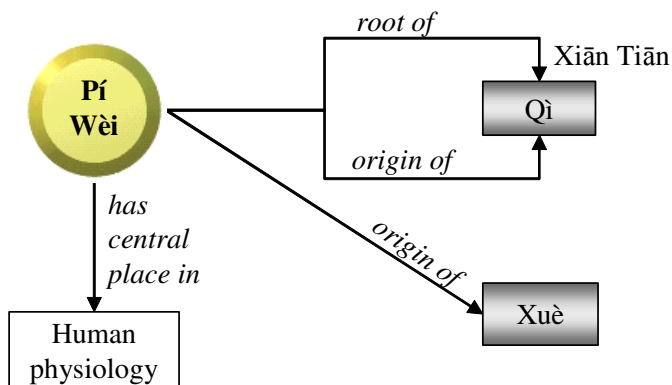
This relationship reflects the basic balance between Yīn and Yáng.



This relation is of mutual nourishment and assistance. If Shèn-Yīn = deficient → not enough Yīn energy through to Xīn. Xīn-Yīn becomes deficient and Xū-Rè in Xīn will arise.

Pí and Wèi

Tonifying Wèi and Pí indirectly tonifies all the other organs.



At end of season, the energy goes back to Earth for regeneration → Wèi and Pí could be tonified at end of each season to regenerate the energy. (☝ End of winter)

Pí and Wèi as support of Xīn

Pí produces Xuè on which Xīn depends.

In case of chronic Xīn-Qì Xū or Xīn-Xuè Xū (particularly if rhythm of Heart is irregular) → essential to tonify Wèi.

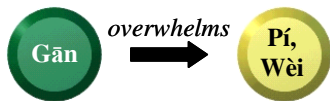
Wǔ Xíng in Pathology

Xiāng Chéng – Overwhelming Relationship

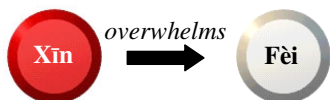
The restraining relationship gets out of hand and becomes excessive.

An abnormal exaggeration of restraining, where one of the phases is weakened, causing the phase that under normal circumstances would overcome it to invade and weaken it further.

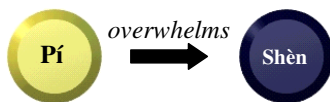
This relationship is also called 'over-acting'.



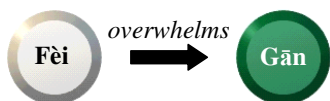
If Gān-Qì stagnates → “invades” Wèi → impairing the function of rotting and ripening → Wèi-Qì does not descend → *nausea*
 If Gān-Qì stagnates → “invades” Pí → impairing the function of transporting and transforming → Pí-Qì does not ascend → *diarrhoea*



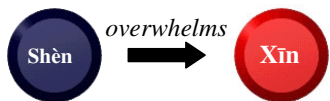
Xīn-Huǒ dries Fèi fluids → Fèi-Yīn Xū.



If Pí holds Shī-Dampness → Pí can obstruct Shèn function of transformation and excretion of fluids.



Seldom happens in practice.
 More common: Fèi Xū triggers off stagnation of Gān-Qì.

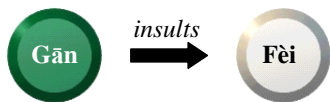


If Shèn-Yīn = deficient → Xū-Rè forms → can be transmitted to Xīn.

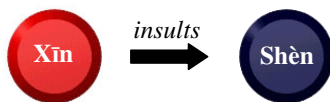
Xiāng Wǔ – Rebellion Relationship

A reversal of the of the Restraining relationship. A phase is disproportionately strong and rebels against the phase that should normally restrain it.

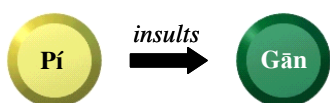
Also called the insulting sequence.



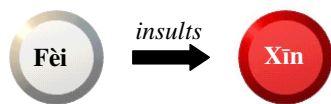
If Gān-Qì stagnates upwards → obstructs chest and breathing.



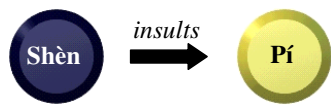
Xīn-Huǒ infuses downwards to Shèn → Shèn-Yīn Xū.



If Pí retains Shī-Dampness → impairs free flow of Gān-Qì.



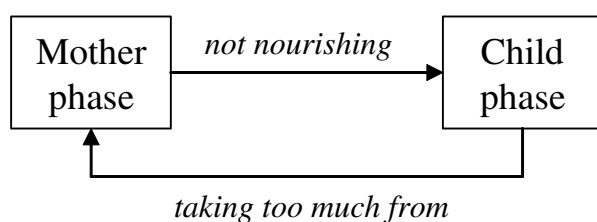
If Fèi obstructed by Tán-Phlegm → impairs circulation of Xīn-Qì.



If Shèn fails to transform fluids → Pí suffers and becomes obstructed by Shī-Dampness.

Xiāng Shēng – Engendering Relationship

There are two possibilities when this relationship is not in balance:



Mother not nourishing the Child



Gān fails to nourish Xīn.
If Gān-Xuè = deficient → Xīn-Xuè = deficient → *palpitations and insomnia*.
Dǎn influences Xīn.
Dǎn makes one courageous.
If Dǎn = deficient → affects the Shén-Mind → *emotional weakness, timidity and lack of assertion*.



The Shén-Mind of Xīn needs to support the mental faculties and capacity of concentration of Pí.
If Xīn-Huǒ = deficient → unable to warm Pí-Yáng → *cold feeling, diarrhoea*.
(Xīn-Huǒ = derived from Shèn-Yáng)



If Pí function (transformation, transportation) of fluids = impaired → *Tán-Phlegm*.
Tán-Phlegm often settles in Fèi → *breathlessness, asthma*.



Fèi-Qì descends towards Shèn which “hold” it down.
Fèi send fluids down to Shèn.
If Fèi-Qì Xū → Qì and fluids cannot descend to Shèn → *breathlessness (Shèn unable to receive Qì), dryness of Shèn*.



Shèn-Yīn nourishes Gān-Yīn and Gān-Xuè.
If Shèn-Yīn Xū → Gān-Yīn Xū and/or Gān-Xuè Xū → *tinnitus, dizziness, headaches, irritability*.
(one of the most important and common relationships in clinical practice)

Child taking too much from the Mother



Xīn is taking too much from Gān.
If Xīn-Xuè Xū general deficiency of Xuè → affect Gān storage of Xuè → *scanty periods and amenorrhoea (women)*.



If Pí does not make enough Xuè → Xīn will suffer → *palpitations, insomnia, poor memory, slight depression*.



If Fèi-Qì Xū → Pí-Qí will be affected → *tiredness, no appetite, loose stools*.
Pí-Qí Xū and Fèi-Qì Xū often occur together.



If Shèn-Qì Xū → Shèn fails to hold Qì down, Qì will rebel upwards → obstructs Fèi → *breathlessness*.



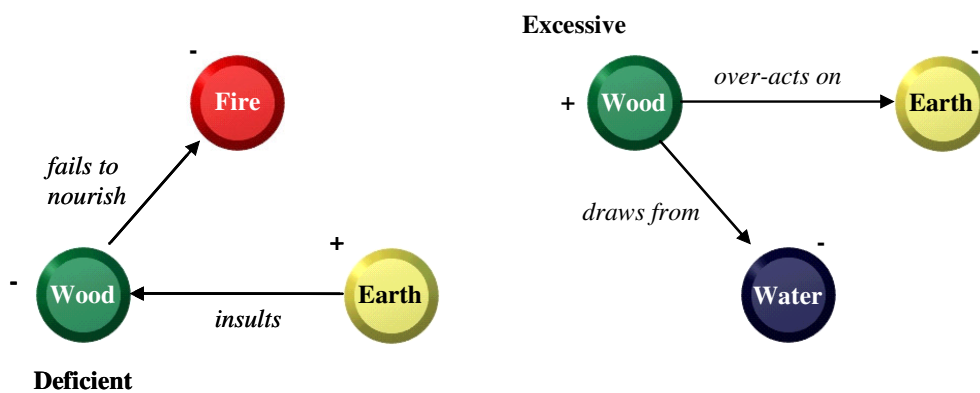
Gān-Xuè nourishes and replenishes the Shèn-Jīng.
If Gān-Xuè Xū (long period of time) → possible deficiency of Shèn-Jīng → *dizziness, tinnitus, night sweating, sexual weakness*.

Relations of Xū and Shí of phases

Each phase can be out of balance in four ways:

If phase is:

- in excess → over-acts on another along the overwhelming relationship;
- deficient → insulted by another along the rebellion relationship;
- in excess and “draws” excessively from its Mother;
- deficient → fails to nourish its Child.



The five phases and diagnosis

Imbalance in	Face colour [1]	Sounds	Smells	Emotions
<i>Mù - Wood</i>	Green. → Gān-Qì Zhì.	Shout a lot.	Rancid. → Stagnation of Rè in Gān.	Outbursts of Anger. → Due to rising Gān-Yáng.
<i>Huǒ - Fire</i>	Red. → Excess Xīn-Huǒ.	Laughs a lot.	Burned. → Xīn-Huǒ.	Excessive Joy. → Migraine attack.
<i>Tǔ - Earth</i>	Yellow. → Pí-Qì Xū	Singing tone voice.	Sweetish. → Pí Xū, Shī-Dampness.	Pensiveness, over-concentration. → Pí Xū.
<i>Jīn – Metal</i>	White. → Fèi-Qì Xū.	Crying a lot. Thin and weak voice.	Rank. → Chronic retention of Tán-Phlegm in Fèi.	Grief and Sorrow. → Fèi-Qì Xū.
<i>Shuǐ - Water</i>	Dark, purplish. → Shèn-Yīn Xū.	Groaning and husky tone voice.	Rotten/Putrid. → Shèn/Páng Guāng. → Retention of Shī-Rè.	Fear (anxiety). → Deficiency Shèn Xū.

[1] Two colours on the same face are possible.

The face colour usually shows the underlying cause of the imbalance.

Face colour shows the seat of the root imbalance and the clinical manifestations show the resulting pattern. But use this critically in diagnosis.

The five phases in treatment

If there is any disharmony in an phase, check:

- if this disharmony may be affected by another phase?
- if it is affecting another phase?

If an phase = deficient, check:

- Mother phase;
- if the controlling phase is overwhelming (overacting on);
- if the Child phase drawing too much;
- if insulted (rebellion) by the phase it should control;
- if it is affecting its Child phase.

If an phase = excessive, check:

- if Controlling phase is deficient and fails to control the excessive one;
- if the phase does “invade” the phase it should control;
- if the phase demands too much from Mother phase.

Assignment: make a schema reflecting the above rules.

The five phases in herbal and diet therapy

The “taste” of a food or herb is its intrinsic quality, rather than its actual flavour. Always be careful with too many of anything!

If an organ is diseased → avoid the taste related to the phase that controls that organ along the restraining relationship.

Taste	Effect on the body	Precautions
Sour (Wood)	Generates fluids and Yīn. Is astringent. Can control perspiration and diarrhoea.	Goes to nerves. Can upset Gān. Caution if person suffers from chronic pain.
Bitter (Fire)	Clears Rè, sedates and hardens. Clears Shī-Rè. Subdues rebellious Qì.	Goes to the bones. Excess should be avoided in bone diseases.
Sweet (Earth)	Tonifies, balances and moderates. Tonify deficiency. Stops pain.	Goes to the muscles. Excess can cause weakness of the muscles.
Pungent (Metal)	Scatters. Expels pathogenic factors.	Scatters Qì. Avoid in Qì Xū.
Salty (Water)	Flows downwards. Softens hardness. Treats constipation and swelling.	Can dry the Xuè. Avoid in Xuè Xū.

Knowledge test

1. How can the Xiāng Shēng and Xiāng Kè become unbalanced?
2. Describe what happens when a patient has a disturbed Wood phase?

References

Nàn Jīng chapter 61, 69, 77.

Líng Shū chapter 56.

Bibliography

G. Maciocia, *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, Churchill Livingstone, 1989.

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N. Wiseman & Feng Ye, *A practical dictionary of Chinese Medicine*, Paradigm Publications, 1998

Course notes.