

## Yin Yang

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Yin Yang is a way of classifying things. It is used to describe a **relationship** between two things, so whenever we talk about Yin, we talk about Yang and vice versa. Pairs characterize this classification system. Whenever we call something Yin or Yang, we must always say what it is Yin or Yang *relative to*. The chest is yin *relative to* the back.

For some well-established pairs or pairs in which there are no other logical pairings, the pairing is implied instead of explicitly stating the partner. If we are talking about inherent qualities in something, some may also use Yin or Yang without referring to a comparison. For example, you might hear someone say “Male is Yang.” We know that male is Yang relative to female simply because there is nothing other logical comparison for males. You might also hear someone say, “The sun is yang.” But, it should be understood that this actually means, “The sun is Yang relative to the Yin of the moon.” In fact, Yin Yang literally translated simply means “moon, sun” which provides us with a useful template for figuring out which of a pair to classify as Yin and which to classify as Yang.

Unfortunately, referring to something as Yin or Yang without establishing a pair has led to a confusing practice of referring to Yin and Yang as nouns. Yin and Yang are NOT nouns. They do not represent people, places, or things. They are **adjectives** that describe the **dominant nature or quality** of things.

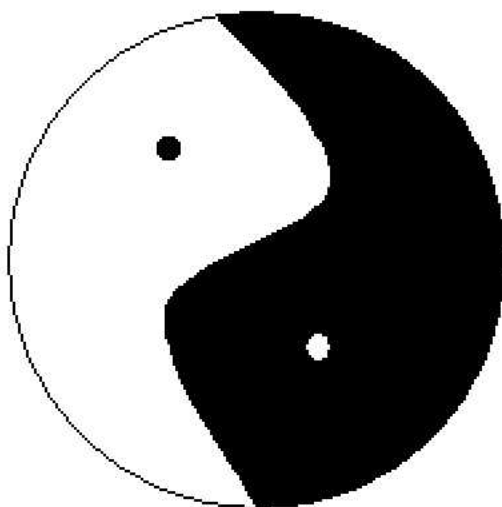
### Defining Yin and Yang

In Chinese, Yin literally means moon (*taiyin* 太陰, the great Yin) although that is no longer the common term for it. It can also be taken to mean shade (ex. *shuyin* 樹陰). In Chinese medicine and philosophy, Yin refers to the feminine or negative (as in a negative ion or a negative electrical current) principle in nature. Yin is characterized by being soft, nurturing, cool, and dark. Yin is associated with storing

Yang literally translated means sun (*taiyang* 太陽, the great Yang). We use Yang to refer to the masculine, hard, protective, and positive nature of things. Objects and processes that are Yang are hot, excited, fast, moving, and light in weight and color.

### Opposition and Interdependence of Yin Yang

As you can see from the definitions of Yin and Yang, Yin Yang pairs work in opposition of each other. One is softer than the second is; therefore the second is harder than the first. At the same time they are interdependent; there can be no Yin without Yang and vice versa. Without an interior, there can be no exterior. In is opposite of out. The *taiji* 太極 symbol is representative of this opposition and interdependence.



In this symbol, black represents Yin and white represents Yang. We see that these two work against each other, yet in a healthy system they are balanced. Also, Yin contains a little Yang and Yang contains a little Yin. When we are talking about processes, Yin Yang are at a *dynamic* interplay; a little Yin changes into Yang and a little Yang changes into Yin. For chemists, this should be neither surprising nor confusing since this happens all the time during reactions in equilibrium. If you have the background, make the analogy of a system in equilibrium after reading the following example.

Think of a small room at 70 degrees. It is 70 degrees in the room, but not all the air is at exactly 70 degrees. Some is a little higher and some is a little cooler. We all know that hot air rises and cool air sinks. In this room the slightly warmer Yang air is close to the ceiling. As it cools off, it becomes more and more Yin until it is the Yin cooler air at the floor. The Yang air had the potential for Yin (products have the potential to become reactants) and it became Yin as that potential was realized. The same process occurs for the Yin cool air on the ground. So we see that there is a dynamic interplay of opposition between the Yin and Yang air in the room, yet the temperature of the room stays constant and balanced.

If I were to disturb that balance and set the thermostat of the room to 75 degrees, Yang opposes Yin and gains some ground; Yin is converted to Yang until a new balance is achieved around 75 degrees where the even opposition of Yin and Yang resumes.

### **Some Yin Yang Pairs**

Usually, Yin Yang pairs are opposites that describe the same quality. For example, hot and cold both describe temperature, heavy and light both describe weight. The following chart lists some Yin Yang pairs, which demonstrate the Yin Yang *relationship* between the two objects or processes:

Yin	Yang
Moon, Planet	Sun, Star
Red Dwarf Star (our Sun)	White Dwarf Star
Earth, Water	Sky, Air
Night, Dark, Shady	Day, Bright, Sunny
Cold, Damp, Cloudy	Hot, Dry, Clear
Internal, Hidden, Deep	External, Exposed, Superficial
Front	Back
Slow, Heavy, Soft	Fast, Light, Hard
Female, Nurturing	Male, Protecting
Chest	Back
Abdomen	Chest
Meditation, Asleep	Stress, Awake
Parasympathetic, Inhibition	Sympathetic, Stimulation
Blood	Qi
Diastole	Systole
Congeeing	Free-flowing
Neural Transmitter, Nutrient	Nerve Function, Metabolism
Wood	Fire

From the examples of the sun and our chests, it is especially apparent how the qualities of Yin and Yang are relative to each other. The sun is Yang relative to the moon and to Earth, but it is Yin relative to hotter stars. But on Earth, no star is more Yin than the sun. So we see that Yin and Yang depend on the point of reference also. The chest is Yin relative to the back, but it is Yang relative to the stomach.

When referring to processes, the substance or form is Yin relative to its function. Neural Transmitters are Yin relative to the Yang of firing nerves. Hormones are Yin relative to the Yang of organ function. We can also think of this of material vs. immaterial. A nutrient is a substance that allows a metabolic process to take place. Wood is the Yin fuel for the Yang fire.

Notice that the sky is Yang relative to the Yin of Earth. As I mentioned before, humans are thought of as vessels between heaven and earth in Chinese philosophy. The sky above us is Yang; the ground below is Yin. When we are healthy, these two are in balance between us and we are truly the middle ground and balance in middle of the sky and the earth. The ground nurtures us and provides substances that make us strong. If we get too much earth (overeate), we shift closer to the Yin: we become heavy, slow, soft. Our bodies try to compensate and our skin and hair become lighter at the cost of leaving us less protected. The heaven, or air, gives us life and endurance. If we get too much Yang and hyperventilate, we pass out and go into a Yin unconscious state. If we get too little Yin, Yang dominates and we become skinny, hard (bony). We compensate by darkening our skin, a Yin action. Prolonged excess of Yang results in damage with Yin characteristics: our skin wrinkles and droops and we develop melanoma. It is interesting to note that in virtually every culture in history, we refer to the earth as “Mother Earth” and to the ruler of heaven as “Father.”

## **Brief on Yin Yang in Chinese Medicine**

Yin Yang is used to describe anatomical position and location. Instead of the many words used in English, Chinese doctors are able to accurately describe and locate parts by used of Yin and Yang. Try to categorize these in terms of Yin Yang: pronation, supination, internal, external, medial, lateral, proximal, distal.

You should take note that the bottom of your foot is Yin surface: it is very soft and vulnerable. Walking around barefoot has potential for all sorts of injuries. So why is a Yin surface in such a vulnerable spot? Our feet have a lot of reflexology points in them. Reflexology works along the nervous pathways. Experiments have been done with subjects placed in CAT scans while reflexology was performed on them. We find that stimulation of a reflexology point causes the associated part of the brain to fire. Stimulating the eye point fires the visual cortex. Stimulating the ear point fires the auditory centers, etc. Before we began to wear shoes and pave our grounds, we used to receive constant stimulation of these reflexology points. In Asia, every park has a stone pathway that regular park-goers walk with ease. If we were to walk the same paths, most of us in the U.S. would be yelping in pain because we deprive ourselves of the balancing offered by walking on uneven surfaces. It's unfortunate that we pave our roads and wear shoes all the time. Many of the problems that we suffer as a population are reflective of this loss of regular balancing through foot reflexology.

Out of the many things considered when a Chinese medical doctor diagnosis a patient, qi, Yin Yang, and 5 phase (element) balance are among the first things considered. Yin Yang can is used to both determine the cause of illness and to formulate the plan for treatment.

Often, illness starts out as a chill, cold condition (Yin). Later, a fever develops (Yang) breaks, and then the person recovers. Sometimes there is a cycle of Yin Yang opposition and the patient alternates between sweats and chills, or even has them at the same time. When the Yin Yang balance is restored, the patient begins to recover.

Usually, disease attacks Yin in the winter and spring and Yang during summer and fall. Imbalance in Yin Yang breaks down into four main categories:

- Deficient Yang: Yin dominates even though it is not excessive. Common syndromes that develop are deficient plus cold conditions, poor circulation, low blood pressure, fatigue, hypothyroid conditions, and depression.
- Deficient Yin: Yang dominates even though it is not excessive. Common problems are deficient plus heat conditions, sore throat, herpes virus strain break outs, hyperthyroid syndrome, high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, rheumatism, insomnia, and anxiety.
- Excess Yang: Yang dominates and consumes Yin. Symptoms similar to deficient Yin develop, especially anxiety. Fever, hyperthermia, pathogenic assault, inflammation, stress, and anxiety neurosis also indicate excess Yang.

**Excess Yin:** Yin Dominates and consumes Yang. Excess plus cold conditions develop. It is really hard to become excess in Yin even with prolonged cold damp pathogenic assault. Usually excess Yin develops only hypothermia or with drug abuse which eventually leads to Yin deficiency. Cold, anti-inflammatory responses, and manic depression are indicative of excess Yin, but it is hard to detect. It is thought that excess cortisol, a Yin substance relative to Yang norepinephrine, is a cause of depression.