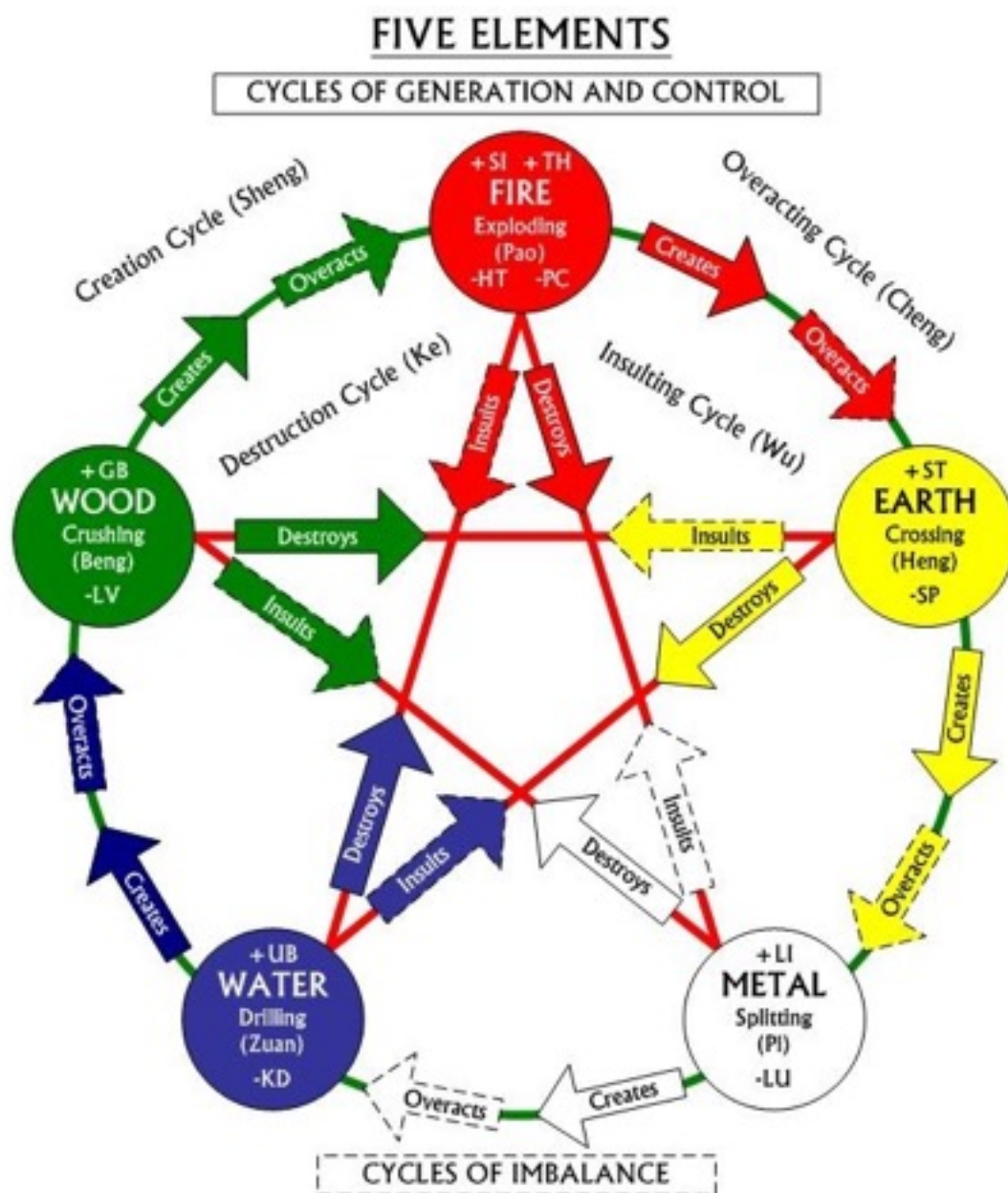


Five Element Theory



The five elements are basic processes of Nature.
They are five qualities of natural phenomena.
They are five phases of a cycle.
They are five inherent capabilities of change of phenomena.

The five element theory developed at the same time as the Yin-Yang theory in China. The western five element theory developed around the same time in Greece. Many cultures have their own version of the five elements.

Classical elements		
Stoicheion (στοιχείον) Greek [hide]		
Air Water Aether Fire Earth		
Tattva – Mahābhūta, Panchikarana Hinduism/Jainism – Buddhism [hide]		
Vayu Ap Akasha Agni Prithvi		
Wū Xíng (五行) Chinese [hide]		
Wood (木) Water (水) Fire (火) Metal (金) Earth (土)		
Godai (五大) Japanese [hide]		
Air (風) Water (水) Void (空) Fire (火) Earth (地)		
Bön Tibetan [hide]		
Air Water Aether Fire Earth		
Alchemy Medieval [hide]		
Air △ Water ▽ Aether Fire △ Earth ▽ Sulphur ♀ Mercury ♀ Salt ⊖		

The main facets of the five element theory are:

1. They are five different qualities of phenomena.
2. They are five movements.
3. They are five phases in the cycle of seasons.
4. They are the interrelationships among the five elements.
5. There are five element correspondences.

For instance.

Wood: can be bent and straightened

Fire: flares upwards

Earth: permits sowing, growing and reaping

Metal: can be moulded and can harden

Water: moistens downwards

Water: liquidity, fluidity, solution

Fire: heat, combustion

Wood: solidity and workability

Metal: solidity, congelation, moldable

Earth: nutrition

The five elements symbolize five different directions of movement of natural phenomena.

Wood=expansion

Fire=upwards

Earth=centre, point of reference, stability

Metal=contraction

Water=downwards

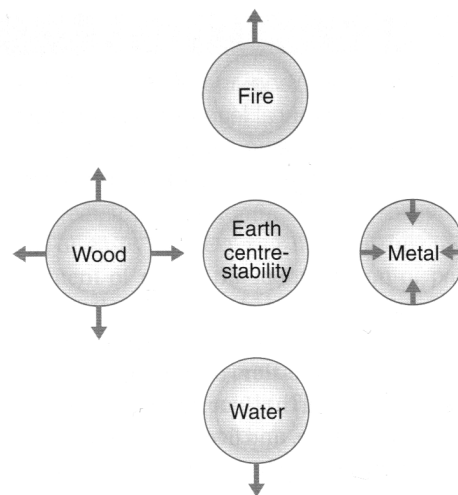
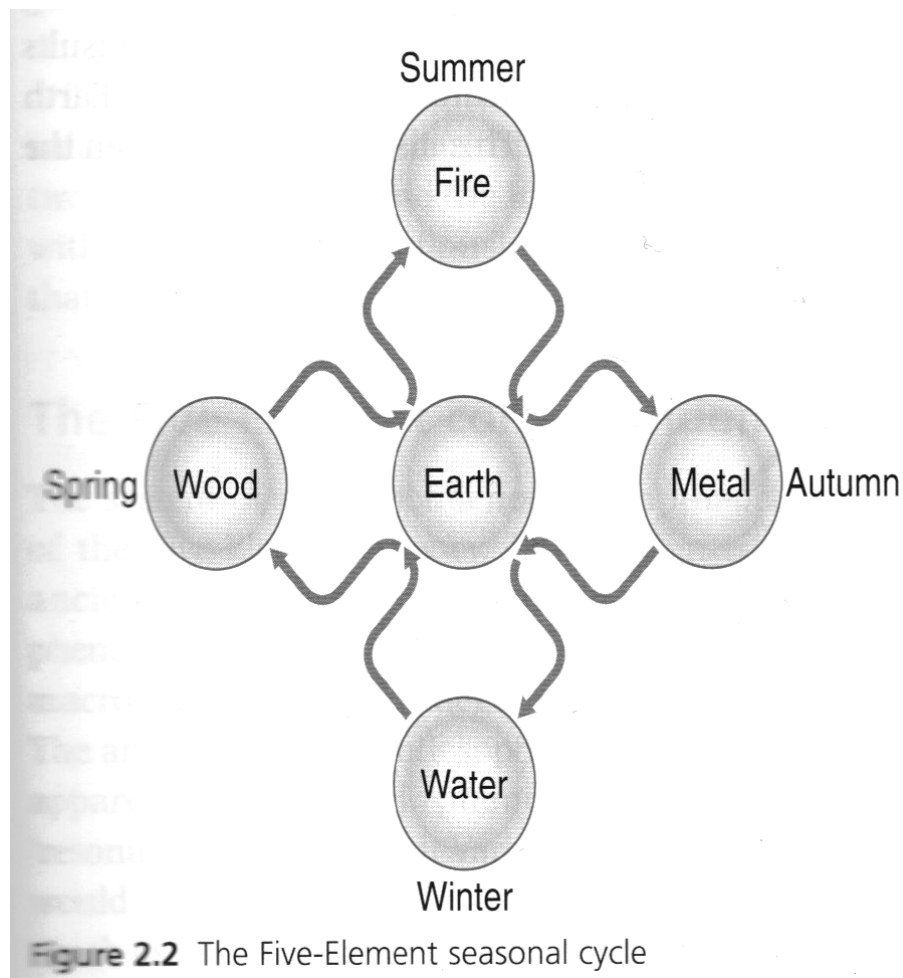


Figure 2.1 The Five-Element movements

The five elements find important applications in medicine. For example, pathological Fire clearly blazes upwards (causing a red face and felling of heat). Wood (Liver-Qi) flows freely in every direction, Metal controls the skin, which contains the body (contraction), Water (Kidney-Qi) has clearly a downward movement (excretions of impure fluids), and Earth is in the centre and therefore the pivot of reference.



Each of the five elements represents a season in the yearly cycle. The Earth element does not correspond to any season because it is in the centre. The Earth corresponds to the late stage of each season, generally the last 18 days. When we treat an animal for prevention purposes we treat the Earth element in the last 18 days of the season to boost the animals health.

Wood=Spring

Fire= Summer

Earth= no season but in some charts is listed as Indian Summer

Metal=Autumn

Water=Winter

1. The cosmological sequence
2. The Generating Sequence
3. The Controlling Sequence
4. The Over-Acting Sequence
5. The Insulting Sequence

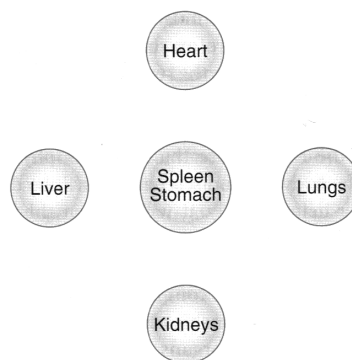


Figure 2.11 The Organ Cosmological sequence

BOX 2.5 FIVE-ELEMENT COSMOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

- Water as the foundation
- Axis Kidneys–Heart
- Stomach and Spleen as the centre
- Stomach and Spleen as support for the Heart
- Earth as centre in cycle of seasons
- Axis Essence–Qi–Mind (*Jing–Qi–Shen*)

The five elements are each assigned a numerological sequence:

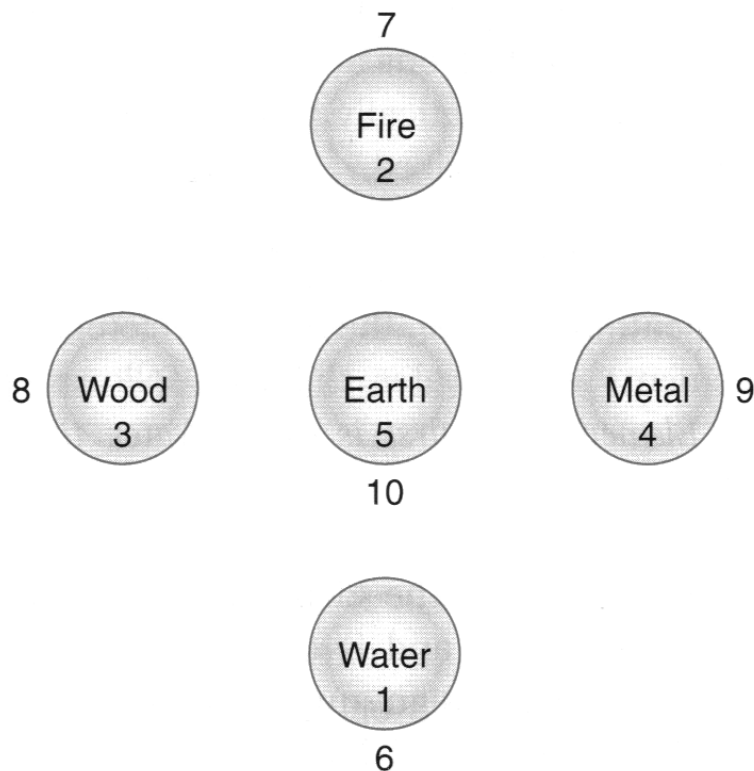


Figure 2.3 The Five-Element numbers

Each element generate and controls another element. Wood generates Fire, Fire generates Earth, Earth generates Metal, Metal generates Water, Water generates Wood. In the controlling sequence wood controls earth, earth controls water, water controls fire, fire controls wood and wood controls earth.

This follows the same sequence as the controlling sequence, but in it, each Element over-controls another so it causes it to decrease. This happens when the balance is broken and under the circumstances, the quantitative relationship among the Elements breaks down so that, at a particular time, one Element is excessive in relation to another.

In a comparison with natural phenomena the destructive actions of human beings towards nature, especially in this century, provide numerous examples of this sequence.

This sequence takes place in the reverse order to the Controlling sequence. Thus, wood insults metal, metal insults fire, fire insults water, water insults earth and earth insults wood.

This also takes place when the balance is broken.

Both the over-acting and insulting sequences are due to abnormal relationships between the elements whereas the controlling and generating sequences are normal interactions between the elements.

Each element has a pair of organs or meridians associated with it. Fire has four meridians.

Wood: Liver and Gall Bladder

Fire: Heart and Small Intestines, Pericardium and Triple Warmer

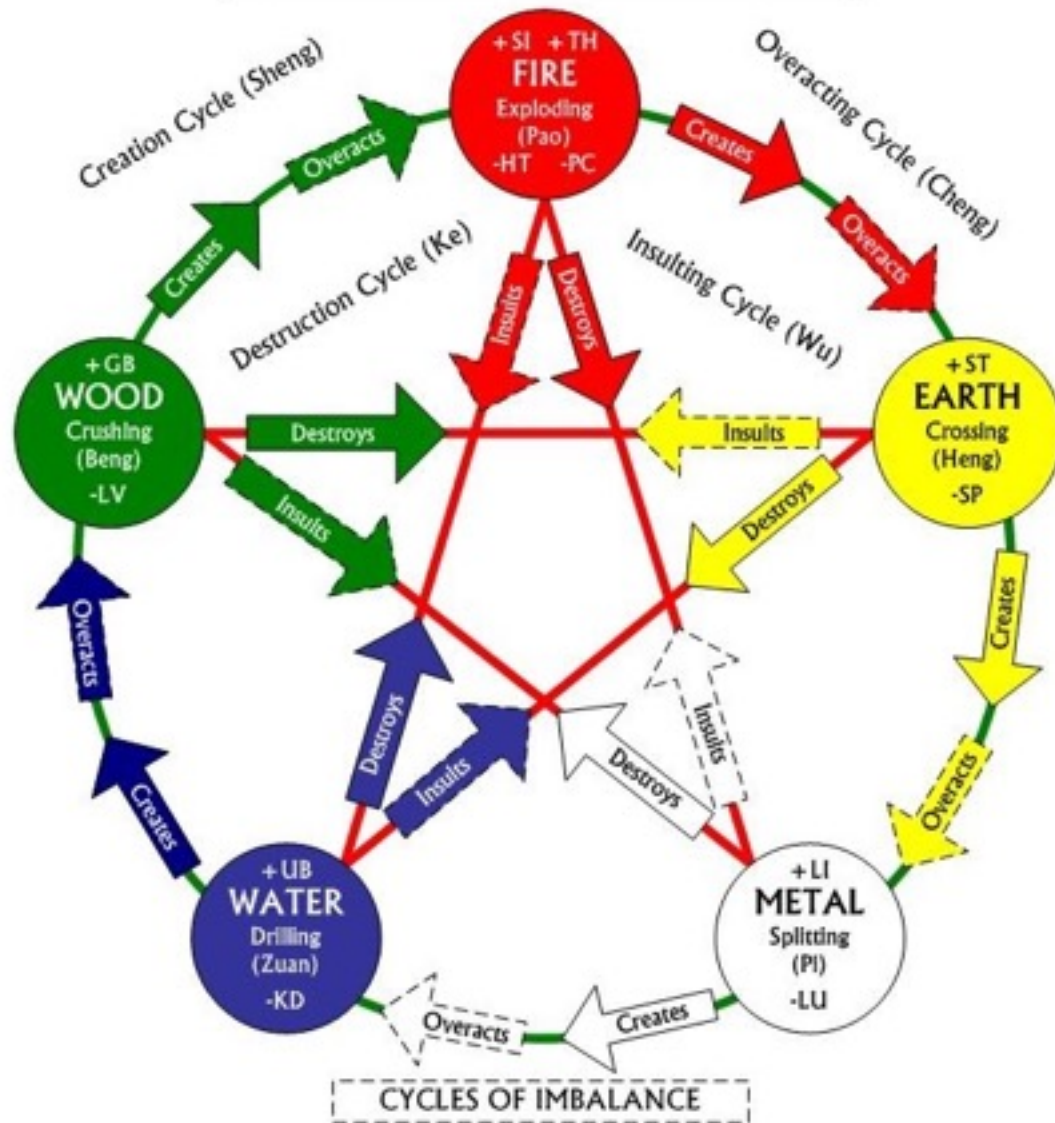
Earth: Spleen and Stomach

Metal: Lungs and Large Intestines

Water: Kidneys and Bladder

FIVE ELEMENTS

CYCLES OF GENERATION AND CONTROL



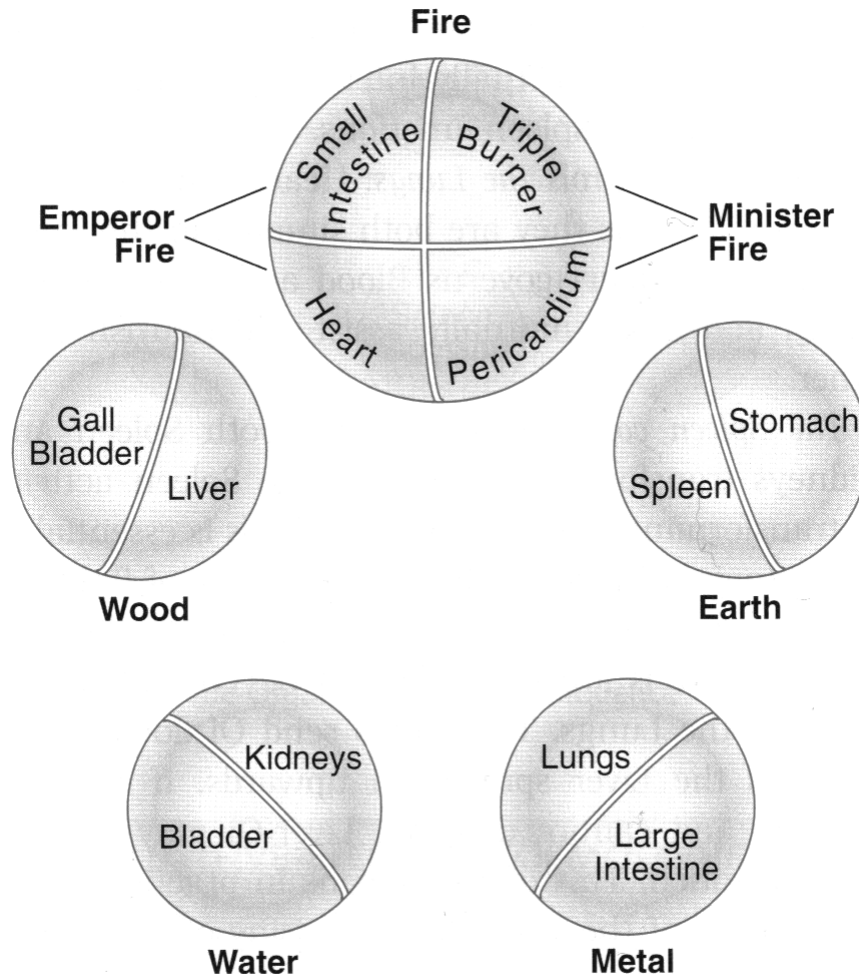


Figure 2.8 The Internal Organs and the Five Elements

The relationships among the five elements are like a model of relationships among the internal organs and between them and the various tissues, sense organs, colors, smells, tastes and sounds.

We should look at the controlling sequence of the organs in the same way as the controlling sequence of the five elements.

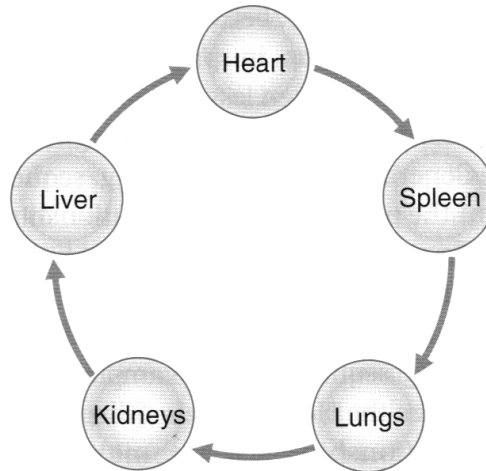


Figure 2.9 The Organ-Generating sequence

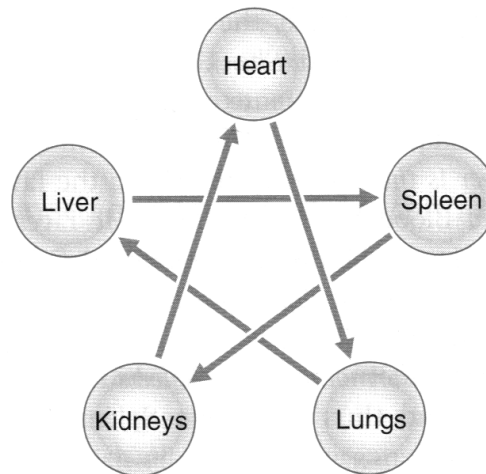


Figure 2.10 The Organ-Controlling and Over-acting sequences

That which generates one element is called its Mother and that which the Mother generates is the Child.

The Liver is the Mother of the Heart: the Liver stores Blood and Blood houses the Mind. If the Liver-Blood is

weak, the Heart will suffer; Liver-Blood deficiency often induces Heart-Blood deficiency and they both affect sleep and dreaming. The Heart is the Mother of the Spleen: Heart-Qi pushes the Blood and thus helps the Spleen's function of transportation.

The Spleen is the Mother of the Lungs: the Spleen provides Food-Qi to the Lungs where it interacts with air to form the Gathering Qi. A deficiency of both Spleen and Lung-Qi is common.

The Lungs are the Mother of the Kidneys: Lung-Qi descends to meet Kidney-Qi. The Lungs also send fluids down to the Kidneys.

The Kidneys are the Mother of the Liver; Kidney-Yin nourishes Liver-Blood. The Kidneys control bones and the Liver the sinew; bones and sinews are inseparable.

In the controlling sequence, controlling must not be taken literally, as the organs actually support rather than suppress each other's functions along the Controlling sequence.

The Liver controls the Stomach and Spleen: the Liver with its free flow of Qi, actually helps the Stomach to rot and ripen food and the Spleen to transform and transport. It is only when the controlling function gets out of hand (in which case it is called over-acting that the Liver can actually interfere with and impair the Stomach and Spleen functions.

The Heart controls the Lungs: Heart and Lungs are closely related as they are both situated in the Upper

Burner. The Heart governs Blood and Lungs govern Qi; Qi and Blood mutually assist and nourish each other.

The Spleen controls the Kidneys; both Spleen and Kidneys transform Body Fluids. The Spleen activity in transforming and transporting fluids is essential to the Kidneys' transformation and excretion of fluids.

The lungs control the Liver; in this case unlike the others, there is a certain element of control of the Liver by the Lungs. The Lungs send Qi downwards whereas the Liver spreads Qi upwards. If Lung-Qi is weak and cannot

descend, Liver-Qi may tend to rise to much.

The Kidneys control the Heart: Kidneys and Heart actually assist and support each other. A proper communication and interaction between Kidneys and Heart is essential for health.

Water is the foundation.

Axis Kidneys-Heart

Stomach and Spleen as the centre

Stomach and Spleen support the Heart

Earth as the centre in cycle of seasons

Axis Essence-Qi-Mind

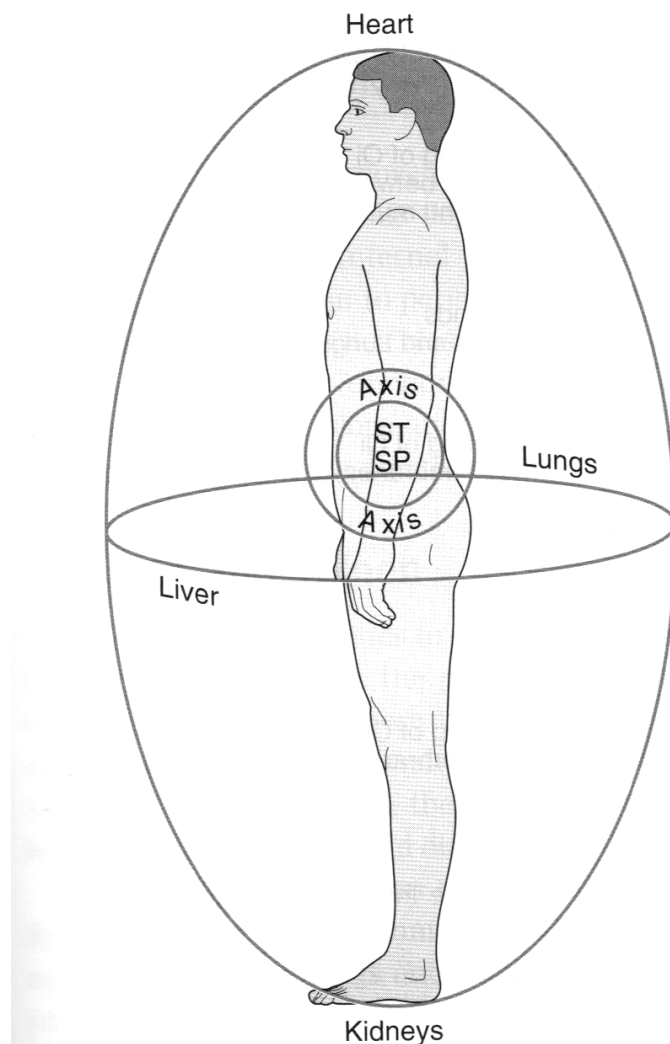


Figure 4.21 The axis, root and outer wheel of the Organs

In this sequence Water is the foundation of the other elements. This corresponds to the importance of the Kidneys as the foundation of Yin and Yang, the basis for the Yin and Yang of all the other organs. The Kidneys and Heart are related along the vertical axis. There is a direct communication between them, not an indirect one through Wood. This fundamental relationship between Water and Fire is probably the most important and basic balance of the body, as it reflects the basic balance between Yin and Yang. The Kidneys govern Water and this has to flow upwards to nourish the Heart. The Heart governs Fire and this has to flow downwards to the Kidneys. Thus, far from being a relationship of control or over-action, the relationship between Kidneys and Heart is one of mutual nourishment and assistance. This relationship also reflects that between Essence and Mind. The Essence is the material basis for the Mind: if the Essence is weak, the Mind will suffer.

If Kidney-Yin is deficient, not enough Yin energy goes through to the Heart; Heart-Yin then becomes deficient and Empty-Heat rises within the Heart. This is a very common situation in clinical practice especially with women during menopause.

From the Cosmological sequence the central role of the Stomach and Spleen as a neutral pivot is very apparent.

This is also fundamental in clinical practice. The Stomach and Spleen are the Root of the Post-Heaven Qi and the origin of Qi and Blood; they therefore nourish all the other organs and naturally occupy a central place in physiology. Thus the Cosmological sequence accurately reflects the importance of the Pre-Heaven Qi (in so far as Water is the foundation), and of the Post-Heaven Qi (in so far as Earth is the Center). The arrangement of the Elements in a circle along the Generating cycle does not highlight these two important concepts.

For this reason the tonifying of Stomach and Spleen indirectly tonifies all other organs. The idea of the Stomach

and Spleen being the center and therefore the source of tonification of all the other organs appears throughout all of the classic Chinese Medicine texts.

If we examine the Cosmological sequence diagram, we can see how the Earth is in between Water and Fire and is the support of Fire. Thus Stomach and Spleen are in practice, the main support for the Heart. In all cases of chronic Heart-Qi or Heart-Blood deficiency, and particularly when the rhythm of the heart is irregular, it is essential to tonify the Stomach. The Spleen also produces Blood on which the Heart depends and which houses the Mind.

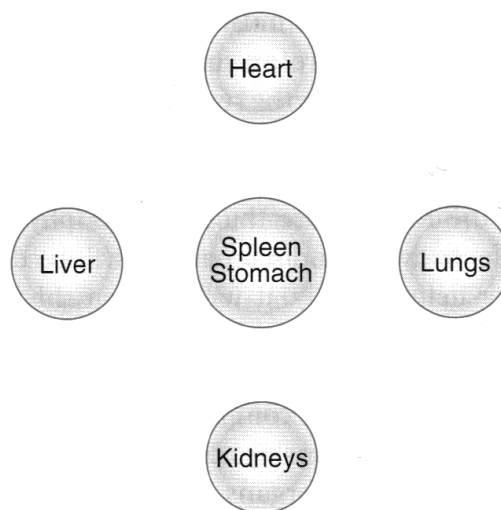


Figure 2.11 The Organ Cosmological sequence

BOX 2.5 FIVE-ELEMENT COSMOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

- Water as the foundation
- Axis Kidneys–Heart
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- Earth as centre in cycle of seasons
- Axis Essence–Qi–Mind (*Jing–Qi–Shen*)

When the Earth is placed in the center, its role in relation to seasons is apparent. The Earth actually belongs to no season as it is the neutral pivot along which the seasonal cycle unfolds. On the other hand the Earth does perform the role of replenishment at the end of each season. Thus at the end of each season, the energy goes back to the Earth for regeneration. In the body, this reaffirms the importance of the Stomach and Spleen as the Center. Thus the Stomach and Spleen might be tonified at the end of each season, particularly at the end of winter, to regenerate the energy.

The very important vertical axis of Water, Earth, and Fire can be seen as a symbol of Essence-Qi-Mind, which is the complex of physical and mental energies in humans and other mammals. The Essence belongs to the Kidney, Qi is derived from the Stomach and Spleen and the Mind is housed in the Heart.

The Five-Element model provides an important and clinically useful pattern of pathological relationships among the Internal Organs.

In the Five-Element relationships, only two of the possible sequences apply to pathological cases, these are the Over-acting and Insulting sequences. The generating sequence can also give rise to pathological conditions when it is out of balance.

The essence of the Five-Element relationships is balance; the Generating and Controlling sequences keep a dynamic balance among the Elements. When this balance is upset for a prolonged period of time, disease ensues.

This occurs when the Controlling relationship among the Elements gets out of control and becomes excessive.

Similarly to the physiological relationships, the Over-acting sequence relationships can be explained in terms of Internal-Organ pathology.

The Liver over-acts on the Stomach and Spleen: if Liver-Qi stagnates, it invades both the Stomach, impairing its function of transforming and transporting. In particular, when Liver-Qi invades the Stomach it prevents Stomach-Qi from descending, which causes nausea, and if prevents Spleen-Qi from ascending, which causes diarrhea.

The Heart over-acts on the Lungs: Heart-Fire can dry up the Lung fluids and cause Lung-Yin deficiency.

The Spleen over-acts on the Kidneys: when the Spleen holds Dampness, this can obstruct the Kidneys' function of transformation and excretion of fluids.

The Lungs over-act on the Liver: Lung-Heat or Phlegm-Heat may be transmitted to the Liver.

The Kidneys over-act on the Heart: if Kidney-Yin is deficient, Empty-Heat forms and this can be transmitted to the Heart.

These relationships along the Insulting sequence also occur in pathological conditions.

The Liver insults the Lungs: Liver-Qi can stagnate upwards and obstruct the chest and breathing. Liver-Fire may also obstruct the descending of Lung-Qi and cause asthma.

The Heart insults the Kidneys: Heart-Fire can infuse downwards to the Kidneys and cause Kidney-Yin deficiency.

The Spleen insults the Liver: if the Spleen retains Dampness, this can overflow and impair the free flow of Liver-Qi.

The Lungs insult the Heart: if the Lungs are obstructed by Phlegm they can impair the circulation of Heart-Qi.

The Kidneys insult the Spleen: if the Kidneys fail to transform fluids, the Spleen will suffer and become obstructed by Dampness.

The Generating sequence can also give rise to pathological states when out of balance. There are two possibilities:

1. the Mother Element not nourishing the Child Element

2. the Child Element taking too much from the Mother Element
The Liver (Mother) affecting the Heart (Child); this happens when the Liver fails to nourish the Heart.

Specifically, when Liver-Blood is deficient, it often affects Heart-Blood, which becomes deficient, and palpitations and insomnia ensue. Another particular way in which Wood affects Fire is in the effect of the Gall Bladder on the Heart. This happens on a psychological level. The Gall Bladder controls the capacity of making decisions, not so much in the sense of being able to distinguish and evaluate what is right and what is wrong, but in the sense of having the courage to act on a decision. Thus, it is said in Chinese medicine that a strong Gall Bladder makes one courageous.

This psychological trait of the Gall Bladder influences the Heart, as the Mind (housed in the Heart) needs the support of decisiveness and courage given by a strong Gall Bladder. In this way, a deficient Gall Bladder can affect the Mind (of the Heart) causing emotional weakness, timidity and lack of assertion.

The Heart (Child) affecting the Liver (Mother): if Heart-Blood is deficient, it can lead to general deficiency of Blood, which will affect the Liver storage of Blood. This causes scanty periods or amenorrhoea.

The Heart (Mother) affecting the Spleen (Child); the Mind of the Heart needs to support the mental faculties and capacity of concentration, which belongs to the Spleen. Another aspect of this relationship is in Heart-Fire deficient being unable to warm Spleen-Yang and leading to cold feeling and diarrhea. Ultimately however, the physiological Fire of the Heart is itself derived from Kidney-Yang.

Each Element can be out of balance in four ways:

1. it is in excess and over-acts on another along the Over-acting sequence.
2. it is in excess and draws from its Mother Element
3. it is deficient and fails to nourish its Child

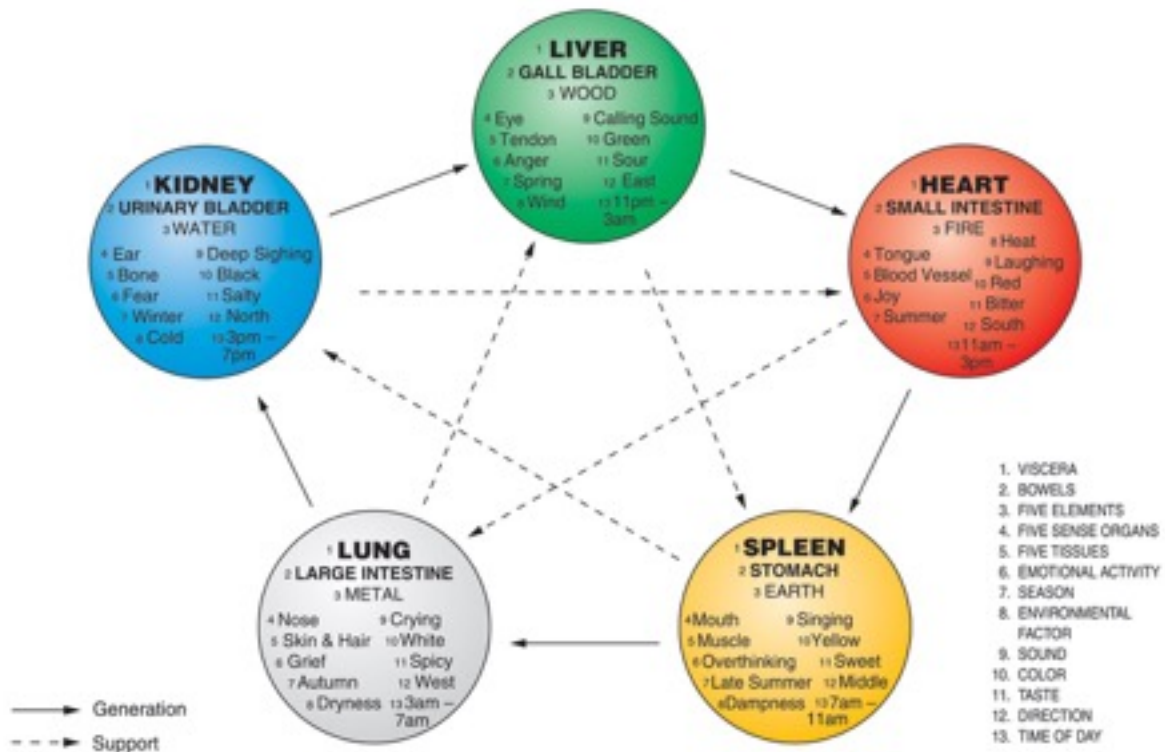
4. it is deficient and is insulted by another along the Insulting sequence.

Hsing-I	劈 pi	崩 péng	鑽 [钻] zuan	炮 páo	橫 héng
movement	cleave, split, divide	crush	drill, bore	cannon, pound	cross
element	METAL	WOOD	WATER	FIRE	EARTH
character	金	木	水	火	土
yin organ	lung 3-5 am	liver 1-3 am	kidney 5-7 pm	heart 11-1 pm	spleen 9-11 am
direction	West	East	North	South	Center
season	Autumn	Spring	Winter	Summer	Long Summer
color	white	green	black	red	yellow
taste	pungent	sour	salty	bitter	sweet
sensory organ	nose	eye	ear	tongue	mouth
emotion	sad	angry	afraid	happy	pensive
human sound	weep	shout	groan	laugh	sing
condition	dry	windy	cold	hot	damp
event	harvest	birth	storage	growth	trans-formation
smell	rank	goatish	rotten	burning	fragrant
yang organ	large intestine 5-7 am	gall bladder 11-1 am	bladder 3-5 pm	small intestine 1-3 pm	stomach 7-9 am
tissue	skin/hair	sinew	bones	blood vessels	flesh
word	HUI	SHIU	CHUEI	HUR	FU

= CREATION = DESTRUCTION

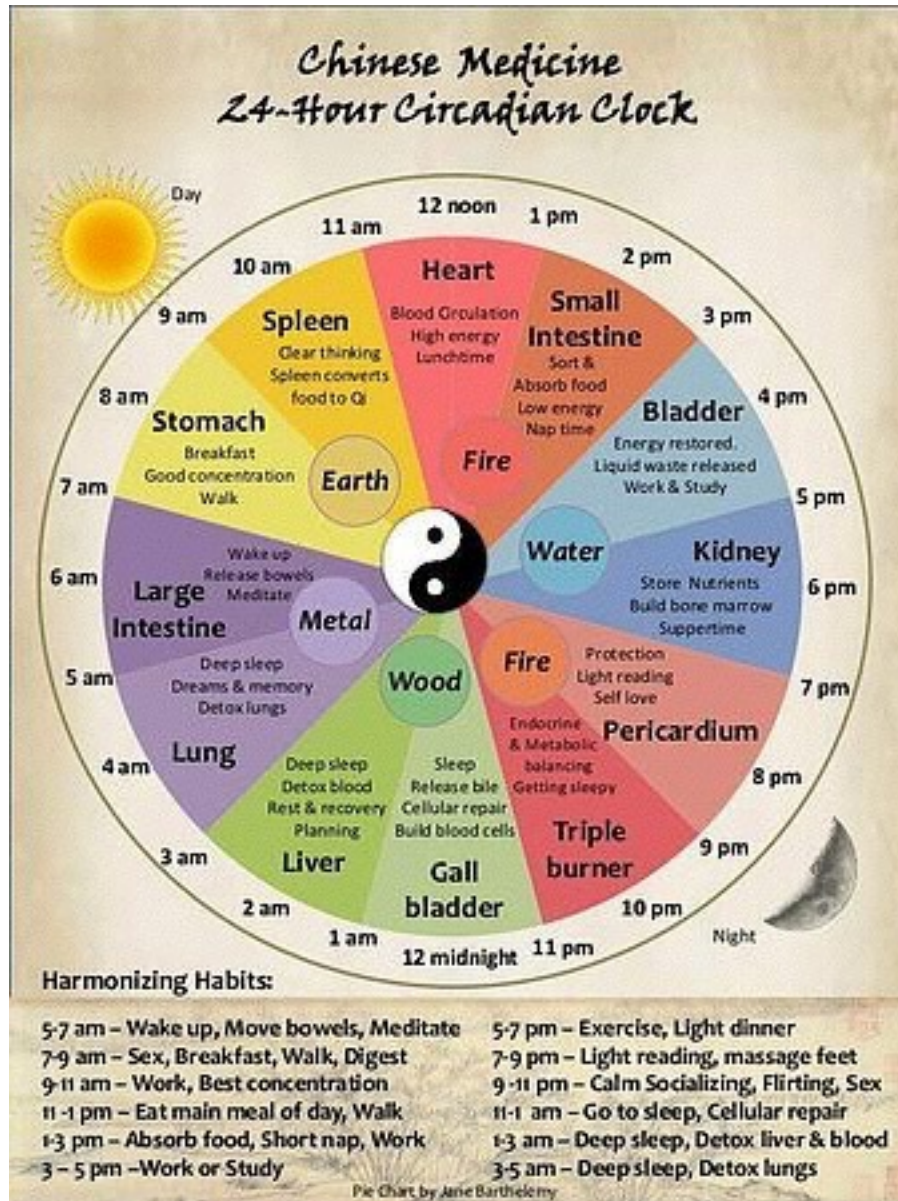
The Five-Element model of correspondences is extensively used in diagnosis. This is based mostly on the correspondences between Elements and smell, color, taste and sound. The aspects of diagnosis related to the Five Elements discussed are listed above and below.

CLASSIFICATION OF THINGS ACCORDING TO THE THEORY OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS



Movement	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Planet	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Mental Quality	idealism, spontaneity, curiosity	passion, intensity	agreeableness, honesty	intuition, rationality, mind	erudition, resourcefulness, wit
Emotion	anger, altruism	hatred, love	anxiety, joy	grief, bravery	fear, gentleness
Zang (yin organs)	liver	heart/pericardium	spleen/pancreas	lung	kidney
Fu (yang organs)	gall bladder	small intestine/San Jiao	stomach	large intestine	urinary bladder
Sensory organ	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears
Body Part	tendons	pulse	muscles	skin	bones
Body Fluid	tears	sweat	saliva	mucus	urine
Finger	index finger	middle finger	thumb	ring finger	pinky finger
Sense	sight	taste	touch	smell	hearing
Taste^[13]	sour	bitter	sweet	pungent	salty
Smell	rancid	scorched	fragrant	rotten	putrid
Life	birth	youth	adulthood	old age	death, conception
Animal	scaly	feathered	human	furred	shelled

The five elements are also part of an internal clock cycle that can be used to treat the various organs at the times they are the strongest or weakest.



The all foods and herbs are related to the five elements as well in Chinese Medicine. Each herb and for has a Yin or Yang nature and an elemental quality which is used to treat the animal.



Energetic properties of foods. (Adapted from Bensford-Cooke: *Shiatsu: theory and practice*, ed 2, Edinburgh, 2003, Churchill Livingstone.)

We will cover how to treat the various imbalanced elements when we get to Etiology, Pathology and Diagnosis part of this course. It is important to build slowly on the knowledge of TCVM and learn the foundations well. Building a strong and broad foundation will help us as we get deeper into the subject matter.