

Ren Zhai's Direct Indication Formula Discussion: Preface / 仁齋直指方論: 總論

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The Classic Text:

陽根於陰，陰根於陽，陰陽互根，榮衛不息。陽動所以為陰之役使，陰靜所以為陽之鎮守。

The Translation:

The [yáng] roots in [yīn], and the yīn roots in yáng. The yīn and yáng root in each other. The [yáng qì and the yīn qì] are ceaseless. The movement of the yáng is how the yīn is able to work; the stillness of the yīn is how the yáng is able to keep watch.

The Commentary:

One of the richest aspects of ancient Chinese thought is the harmony of yīn and yáng, as represented by the "tai chi" symbol showing the interplay of white and black swirls. Yīn, the black swirl, originally meant the shady side of a hill, while yáng, the white swirl, originally meant the sunny side. The two dots - white in the black and black in the white - indicate that yīn is rooted in yáng and yáng is rooted in yīn. As elegant as this symbol is, though, it can still be hard to understand what it means in a concrete, every-day kind of way.

When I was in acupuncture school, I was lucky enough to have it demonstrated to me first hand. One weekend, over-tired with studying muscle anatomy, I hopped in my truck and just drove. Before long I was clear of the city and in the foothills of Mount Hood, surrounded by lush, wet, vibrant foliage. Never having driven all the way over the range, I continued on, and after less than an hour the landscape had changed entirely: the rainy forest on the Western slope was replaced by a bone-dry fire forest facing East. Yīn and yáng.

One of the most important things I tell my patients is that yīn is productive. Great activity - great yáng - without rest and reflection, often results in burnout and irrelevant results, while activity supported and informed by rest and reflection almost always hits the mark. Such is the relationship between yīn and yáng.

Translation Notes:

[Yáng] is the expansive, warming, protective aspect of a thing, in this case, of qì.

[Yīn] is the contractive, cooling, nourishing aspect of a thing, in this case, of qì.

[yáng qì and the yīn qì]: this is actually says 'the protective qì and the thriving qì', an elaboration of which would be too technical for our purposes.