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A Brief Analysis of the Correspondence Between Root-Qi and Branch-Qi of the Six Qi

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Abstract: ***There are three major reasons why the theory of Five Movements and Six Qi employs Three Yins and Three Yangs for designation. First, the theories of Three Yins and Three Yangs and of Five Movements and Six Qi respectively originate from the Yin-Yang theory and the Five-Elements theory, and the Yin-Yang theory and the Five-Elements theory are fused into one through the Qi theory, which provides the philosophical premise for designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs. Second, the core spirit of both Three Yins and Three Yangs and the Five Movements is to conceptualize the movement of Qi as a circular cycle advancing in a definite sequence. Third, Three Yins and Three Yangs were originally used to designate the Zang-Fu viscera and meridians of the human body, whereas the Five Movements in the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi are used to describe the Qi of Heaven and Earth and nature; designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs thus connects the Qi of Heaven and Earth with the viscera and meridians of the human body.***

Keywords: Root-Branch Correspondence of Six Qi, Five Movements and Six Qi, Qi Theory, Three Yins and Three Yangs.

1. Introduction

The Suwen · Great Treatise on the Cyclical Mechanism of Heaven states: "Above Jue-Yin prevails Wind-Qi; above Shao-Yin prevails Heat-Qi; above Tai-Yin prevails Damp-Qi; above Shao-Yang prevails Minister-Fire-Qi; above Yang-Ming prevails Dry-Qi; above Tai-Yang prevails Cold-Qi. These are termed the root, also known as the Six Primordial Energies." This passage first correlates Three Yins and Three Yangs with the Six Qi. The Suwen · Great Treatise on the Subtle Significance of the Six Fundamental Pivots also records: "Above Shao-Yang is governed by Fire-Qi, with Jue-Yin as the intermediate manifestation; above Yang-Ming is governed by Dry-Qi, with Tai-Yin as the intermediate manifestation; above Tai-Yang is governed by Cold-Qi, with Shao-Yin as the intermediate manifestation; above Jue-Yin is governed by Wind-Qi, with Shao-Yang as the intermediate manifestation; above Shao-Yin is governed by Heat-Qi, with Tai-Yang as the intermediate manifestation; above Tai-Yin is governed by Damp-Qi, with Yang-Ming as the intermediate manifestation. These are called the root. Beneath the root lies the intermediate manifestation; beneath the manifestation lies the branch-Qi. When root and branch diverge, Qi manifests in disparate forms." Hence arose the designations of Jue-Yin-Wind-Wood, Shao-Yin-Sovereign-Fire, Tai-Yin-Damp-Earth, Shao-Yang-Minister-Fire, Yang-Ming-Dry-Metal, and Tai-Yang-Cold-Water, upon which the Five-Movements-Six-Qi theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) was constructed. This paper aims to explore why Five Movements and Six Qi are designated by Three Yins and Three Yangs, and why such pairings are made. To investigate this question, one must necessarily start with the Five Movements and Six Qi.

2. The Theory of Five Movements and Six Qi

Since the root-branch theory of Six Qi derives from the Yun-Qi (Circulating Qi) doctrine in TCM, it is necessary first to clarify what the doctrine of Five Movements and Six Qi is and what functions it serves. Meng Qingyun holds that the ancient Yun-Qi learning is a discipline that discusses the laws of cyclical changes in nature, and that the doctrine of Five Movements and Six Qi promoted the development of TCM theories, including the expansion of the framework of the TCM theoretical system, the establishment of epidemiological outlines for diseases induced by the Six Qi and governed by the Five Movements, and the proposal of the theoretical program for Qi-transformative pharmacology as well as the medication rules guided by Five Movements and Six Qi [1]. The Yun-Qi doctrine is also a discipline by which the ancients explored the relationships between human physiology and pathology on the one hand and phenology, meteorology, and astronomical phenomena on the other [2]. Its contributions to the academic development of TCM mainly include: (1) expanding the framework of the TCM theoretical system; (2) establishing the epidemiological outlines for diseases governed by the Five Movements and induced by the Six Qi; (3) proposing the theoretical program of the doctrine of Qi transformation; (4) expounding pathogenesis and further developing it into the doctrine of pathogenesis; (5) serving as a mirror for the health-preservation theories of later generations [3]. Through their research on the phonology, phenology, calendars, and astronomy recorded in the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi, Meng Qingyun and others proposed that these seven treatises appeared roughly from the mid-to-late Western Han to the early Eastern Han [4].

Tao Gongding maintains that the Yun-Qi doctrine is a knowledge system built upon the ancients' long-term observations of human physiological and pathological changes, phenology, meteorology, and astronomical phenomena. Combining the theories of Five Elements, Yin-Yang, and Qi, and taking the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches as tools for deduction, it reveals the cyclical laws between human life activities and natural phenomena, thereby exploring the laws of disease onset as well as the methods of disease prevention and treatment; it contains many ideas of "macro-ecological medicine" [5]. Yang Wei holds that Five Movements and Six Qi constitute a TCM theory with the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches, Five Elements, and Yin-Yang as its guiding frameworks; synthesizing multiple fields and systems of knowledge, it can explain the

spatiotemporal laws between disease, life, and nature [6].

In summary, the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi were roughly formed during the mid-to-late Western Han to the early Eastern Han. The doctrine of Five Movements and Six Qi belongs to the scope of TCM. From a medical perspective it interprets the relationship between Heaven and human beings; through Yin-Yang, Five Elements, and Six Qi it connects Heaven with human beings, providing TCM with a more magnificent vision and pattern. Notably, however, the foundation that enables the connection between Heaven and human beings is the construction of the Qi theory.

3. The Theory of Qi

"Qi" is one of the most important and complex concepts in ancient Chinese philosophy. From the pre-Qin period to modern times, "Qi," as the basis for the ancients' interpretation of the existence and changes of the Heavenly Way, nature, human affairs, and the mind, has always been dynamic in the ideological currents of each era. "Qi" is both an independent conceptual system and, together with concepts such as "Heaven," "Dao," "Principle (Li)," and "Mind (Xin)," once constituted many important propositions in ancient thought [7]. With the movement and transformation of Qi, the forms it manifests are manifold, and the corresponding concepts can be large or small. Yet the nature of Qi as the origin of the world remains unchanged. From a philosophical perspective, the doctrine of Yin-Yang and Five Elements is the basic content of Chinese cosmology, which holds that the universe is the flow and transformation of the Qi of Five Elements and Yin-Yang [8]. Under this cosmological view, all things in Heaven and Earth are closely connected with Qi as the medium; even objects are formed through Qi transformation.

Human beings live between Heaven and Earth, and human life is the result of the interaction of the Yin-Yang Qi of Heaven and Earth. The human body is regarded as a small universe and, at the same time, the flow and condensation of the Qi of Yin-Yang and Five Elements. On this basis, TCM theory holds that the five Zang viscera of the human body also possess Five-Element attributes: the Liver pertains to Wood, the Heart to Fire, the Lung to Metal, the Kidney to Water, and the Spleen to Earth. Wood, Fire, Metal, Water, and Earth are neither elements nor concrete entities; they are all subsumed under the category of "Qi." Qi is not a concrete object, yet objects are engendered by Qi [8].

The Suwen · Great Treatise on the Cyclical Mechanism of Heaven states: "In Heaven, Spirit manifests as Wind; on Earth, it manifests as Wood… The interaction of form and Qi engenders and transforms the myriad things." Guiyu-Qu, citing the Tai-Shi Tian-Yuan Ce, says: "The vast and boundless Void lays the foundation of primordial transformation; the myriad things take their beginnings therefrom; the Five Movements revolve throughout Heaven, disseminating the spiritual genuine-Qi… generation upon generation, the myriad things are fully manifest; your servant has passed this down for ten generations." Among these words, "disseminating the spiritual genuine-Qi" endows Qi with its attribute of being the origin. The Five Movements are the different states and tendencies of Qi, and Qi is also said to possess different attributes such as Yin and Yang, softness and hardness. Guiyu-Qu then continues: "The Qi of Yin and Yang each has its degree of plenitude and paucity, hence they are called Three Yins and Three Yangs. That forms flourish or decline means that the governance of the Five Elements each has excess or insufficiency." Therefore, "Qi" is the pivotal nexus that connects Yin-Yang with the Five Movements and Six Qi; the Qi theory provides theoretical support for designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs.

4. The Model of Three Yins and Three Yangs

The model of Three Yins and Three Yangs derives from the ancient Chinese cosmological concept of the six-fold division of time and space and the philosophical idea of dividing unity into three [9]. As Laozi states: "Dao generates One; One generates Two; Two generates Three; Three generates the myriad things." The emergence of Three Yins and Three Yangs is precisely the result of One becoming Two and Two becoming Three; this is an analysis at the philosophical level and constitutes the ideological premise for the construction of the model of Three Yins and Three Yangs. Yet the expression Three Yins and Three Yangs is not found in ancient literature outside medicine; hence successive generations have regarded it as an original creation of physicians [10]. Why did ancient medical classics divide Yin-Yang into three? This must necessarily be to better explain and demonstrate the human body itself, and to better elucidate medical principles.

At present, the establishment and concrete application of the concepts of Three Yangs and Three Yins can be traced back at the earliest to the medical texts unearthed from the Mawangdui Han tombs. For example, the Yin-Yang Moxibustion Canon of the Vessels records the Arm-Shao-Yin Vessel, Arm-Ju-Yin Vessel, Ear Vessel, Tooth Vessel, Shao-Yang Vessel, Yang-Ming Vessel, Ju-Yang Vessel, Shoulder Vessel, Jue-Yin Vessel, Da-Yin Vessel, and Shao-Yin Vessel. The Foot-Arm Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon also records the Foot-Yang-Ming, Foot-Shao-Yin, Arm-Tai-Yang, Arm-Shao-Yang, Foot-Tai-Yang, Arm-Tai-Yin, Arm-Shao-Yin, Arm-Yang-Ming, Foot-Shao-Yang, Foot-Tai-Yin, and Foot-Jue-Yin. Among these there are five hand vessels and six foot vessels; compared with the Nei-Jing, the Hand-Jue-Yin Vessel is absent. Judging from the text, the medical texts unearthed from the Mawangdui Han tombs predate the Nei-Jing, which is a genuine reflection of the early meridian theory gradually incorporating the concepts of Three Yangs and Three Yins. It was not until the era of the Nei-Jing that the six sub-concepts among the concepts of Three Yangs and Three Yins—namely Tai-Yang, Yang-Ming, Shao-Yang, Tai-Yin, Shao-Yin, and Jue-Yin—were explicitly established, although traces of the earlier period remained, such as the interchangeable use of Tai-Yang and Ju-Yang [11]. Moreover, within the Huang-Di Nei-Jing, the model of Three Yins and Three Yangs is discussed most extensively in the meridian theory and the Yun-Qi theory. As mentioned above, the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi were roughly formed during the mid-to-late Western Han to the early Eastern Han, whereas the two ancient moxibustion canons, the Yin-Yang Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon and the Foot-Arm Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon, have been verified to predate the Huang-Di Nei-Jing [12]. This shows that before

the formation of the Yun-Qi doctrine, the model of Three Yins and Three Yangs had already been applied to the meridian theory, and it was highly likely that it had already become a consensus among physicians. The author holds that this point is the key to exploring the issue of designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs.

The quantity of Yin-Yang Qi is the basis for the division of Three Yins and Three Yangs; Jue-Yin and Yang-Ming both represent the moments when the two sides of Yin and Yang, at their extreme prosperity, are about to decline. The naive dialectical thoughts of mutual transformation, waxing and waning, and mutual interpenetration of Yin and Yang run through the model of Three Yins and Three Yangs; in essence they all treat our material world as a circular cycle moving along a certain sequence—whether it is Yang or Yin, it proceeds from prosperity to decline and then from decline back to prosperity, and during this process the two sides of Yin and Yang mutually contain each other. This circular cycle indicates both the direction and sequence of the movement of things and reflects the distribution of things and phenomena in terms of Yin-Yang attributes [9]. From this it can be seen that the connotation of Three Yins and Three Yangs is very rich: it can represent both the states of things' movement and change and the attributes of things. The characteristics of Yin-Yang—mutual transformation, waxing and waning, unity and opposition—and their "cyclical" spirit are extremely similar to the mutual generation and restraint and the cyclical recurrence of the Five Elements; it can even be considered that their core spirit is both to view the movement of Qi as a circular cycle advancing along a certain sequence. With this mutual affinity, together with the tempering of time, the doctrine of Yin-Yang and the doctrine of Five Elements gradually merged, thereby laying the foundation for the combination of Three Yins and Three Yangs with Five Movements and Six Qi.

5. Root-Branch Theory of Six Qi

Through the series of discussions above, the author holds that the reasons why Five Movements and Six Qi are designated by Three Yins and Three Yangs mainly include three points. First, Three Yins and Three Yangs and Five Movements and Six Qi respectively originate from the doctrine of Yin-Yang and the doctrine of Five Elements, and the doctrine of Yin-Yang and the doctrine of Five Elements are fused into one through the Qi theory, which provides the philosophical premise for designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs. Second, the core spirit of Three Yins and Three Yangs and of the Five Movements is both to view the movement of Qi as a circular cycle advancing along a certain sequence. Third, Three Yins and Three Yangs were originally used to designate the Zang-Fu viscera and meridians of the human body, whereas the Five Movements, in the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi, are used to describe the Qi of Heaven and Earth and nature; designating Five Movements and Six Qi with Three Yins and Three Yangs thereby connects the Qi of Heaven and Earth with the Zang-Fu viscera of the human body.

As for why such pairings are made, this is undoubtedly closely related to the Zang-Fu viscera and meridians of the human body. In the Zang-Fu-meridian system, Tai-Yang represents the Foot-Tai-Yang Bladder and the Hand-Tai-Yang Small Intestine. TCM theory holds that the Bladder and the Kidney are internally-externally related and both pertain to Water, corresponding to Cold as one of the Six Qi of Heaven, while the Small Intestine and the Heart are internally-externally related and both pertain to Fire, corresponding to Sovereign-Fire as one of the Six Qi of Heaven. Then why is Tai-Yang paired with Cold-Water rather than with Sovereign-Fire? The author holds that this is related to the fact that in the early meridian theory the foot meridians were emphasized more than the hand meridians. The earliest works on meridians known today are the Yin-Yang Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon and the Foot-Arm Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon, which describe the meridians by narrating the six foot meridians before the six hand meridians, rather than narrating them in the order of hand first and foot last, from top to bottom. Moreover, when the Yin-Yang Eleven-Vessel Moxibustion Canon names the meridians that circulate in the upper limbs, it prefixes them with positional names; but for the six meridians circulating in the lower limbs, it does not prefix positional names, but only names them with Three Yins and Three Yangs [13]. This concept of emphasizing the foot meridians has a profound influence on later generations, as can be seen in the contents of the Huang-Di Nei-Jing and the Shang-Han Lun. Therefore, Tai-Yang is paired with Cold-Water, and Tai-Yin-Damp-Earth and Jue-Yin-Wind-Wood are likewise. However, Shao-Yin-Sovereign-Fire, Yang-Ming-Dry-Metal, and Shao-Yang-Minister-Fire cannot be explained by this.

This requires recalling the view of life in the Huang-Di Nei-Jing. The Great Treatise on the Cyclical Mechanism of Heaven states: "Therefore in Heaven there is Qi, and on Earth there is Form; the interaction of form and Qi engenders and transforms the myriad things." Qi pertains to Yang and Form pertains to Yin; the combination of Yin and Yang is the premise for nurturing life. In the Huang-Di Nei-Jing, the two sides with opposite Yin-Yang attributes are often paired. For example, at the beginning of the Plain Questions, the Ancient Simple Truth pairs the Yang number seven with women, who pertain to Yin, and the Yin number eight with men, who pertain to Yang; again, in the description of the viscera and bowels, it pairs the Yang number five with the Zang viscera, which pertain to Yin, and the Yin number six with the Fu bowels, which pertain to Yang; and "Heaven takes six as its rhythm, Earth takes five as its regulation," and so on, are all like this. The Great Treatise on the Subtle Significance of the Six Fundamental Pivots states: "After ascent comes descent; that which descends is called Heaven. After descent comes ascent; that which ascends is called Earth… Hence nothing is without exiting and entering, nothing is without ascending and descending." From this it can be seen that the thought of the combination of Yin and Yang and the mutual causation of ascent and descent—this cyclical recurrence and endless generation—occupies an extremely important position in the Huang-Di Nei-Jing, and this view of life also directly influences how Three Yins and Three Yangs designate Five Movements and Six Qi.

For example, Tai-Yang is the Great Yang, the extreme Yang, and the superficial Yang, and requires the sealing-and-storing function of Cold-Water to restrain it. Although Jue-Yin and Yang-Ming are both the moments when the two sides of Yin

and Yang, at their extreme prosperity, are about to decline, it is the descending-astringing nature of Dry-Metal and the ascending-effusing nature of Wind-Wood that promote the mutual transformation between Yin and Yang. Combining these two points, one can understand why Tai-Yang-Cold-Water, Yang-Ming-Dry-Metal, Jue-Yin-Wind-Wood, and Tai-Yin-Damp-Earth are paired as such. “Sovereign-Fire” and “Minister-Fire” first appear in the Seven Treatises on Yun-Qi in the phrase “Sovereign-Fire manifests in illumination; Minister-Fire abides in its position.” Although successive physicians have also elaborated on the meanings of the Sovereign and Minister Fires, they generally felt that the original meaning was lost. Li Wei, using the method of exegesis (xungu), examined its original meaning and held that “Ming (illumination)” is interchangeable with “Meng (commencement),” meaning the beginning, and “Wei (position)” is interchangeable with “Li (establishment),” meaning the ending [14]. The author is more inclined to accept this explanation: that “Sovereign-Fire manifests in commencement” conforms to the nature of Yang, and “Minister-Fire abides in termination” conforms to the nature of Yin; thus Shao-Yin-Sovereign-Fire and Shao-Yang-Minister-Fire are thereby understood.

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