

## Element within Element

The concept of Element within Element is not unique to Worsley. A very clear description of the underlying theme appears in the poem below.

Mr. Shohaku Honma (1904-1962),  
from "Explanation Book of the Five Elements Chart."  
Quoted by Matsumoto and Birch.

Water is the origin and source of everything.  
One of the liquids of Water is the Water of Wood.  
The pond in the Earth is the Water of Earth.  
The other liquid [quicksilver?] is the Water of Metal.  
Fire can melt things, because of the Water of Fire.

Fire is the basic[s] of the created Yang.  
There is no form, but Fire manifests  
and belongs to all Chi [Qi] transformations.  
Rubbing two pieces of Wood together to make sparks;  
this is the Fire of Wood.  
Striking two pieces of Metal together to make sparks;  
this is the Fire of Metal.  
Striking stones together to make Fire;  
this is the Fire of Earth.  
Alcohol and oil can make Fire;  
this is the Fire of Water.

Without Earth nothing can be created.  
Without Earth, Wood cannot grow.  
Without Earth, Fire cannot make flames.  
Without Earth, Metal cannot create.  
Without Earth, Water cannot store,  
settle or stream.

Wood is the Chi of the origin.  
Transformations belong to Wood.  
Wood is created by Water.  
Wood is dependent on Earth.  
Wood makes Fire develop.  
Wood produces Metal.

When Chi changes or transforms, if there is no Metal Chi, it cannot become hard, strong or stiff. Metal Chi makes the form hard. There is Metal Chi, this is why the skin has a hard cover; for instance, the exoskeleton of insects, crabs, etc. When something changes

from soft to hard, or hard to soft, it needs Fire [sic Metal?]. When we use Metal, as for instance when fighting, it should be strong.

### **Element within Element**

Clearly the concept of Element within Element is following the same principle as the concept of Yin within Yang, and Yang within Yin. In the phenomenological world nothing is absolute. Within Five Element Acupuncture 'Element within Element' is used as a further refinement of the primary diagnosis.

Is 'Element within Element' just a way of describing the relationship of two Phases, or is there a difference between say 'Water within Fire' and Fire counter-acting on Water. I do believe that there is a distinction of at least degree.

Element within Element appears to be expressing a basic principle also found in TCM syndromes. Underlying this is the idea expressed in Five Element terms that a problem can manifest 'in situ', i.e. confined to one Element. However, this is something of a simplification, because clearly if the Five Elements are a cybernetic system then the idea of one being 'off' in isolation is an abstraction.

In terms of syndromes, the symptoms of He Qi Xu include palpitations and shortness of breath. The former is cardinal and specific to Heart, the latter is because the Heart and Lungs are the 'complementary' officials, linked by the Ke cycle relation (and Husband/Wife). Even though the primary manifestations are never purely confined to one phase/organ, this is considered to be encapsulated as He Qi Xu, until it reaches a point where one can specifically identify a separate Lu Qi Xu, and then it becomes a combination pattern. We see the same principle at work in relation to Liver Qi Stagnation – where digestive symptoms figure strongly. This is because the Liver overacts on Earth; however, it is considered to be a Liver syndrome while it stops short of creating a distinct Spleen or Stomach syndrome. The 'Element within Element' idea is somewhat similar. An Earth 'type' person may express Anger with a certain 'colouration' that speaks to the 'wood (anger) within Earth', but has not reached the point of spilling over into a separately identified 'Wood' issue.

The 'Element within Element' concept does cause one to question the immediate assignation of an attribute (especially an emotion) to a phase. The character of the emotion (what caused the emotion, and its particular colouration). For example, Anger (Wood) within Fire is likely to be very sudden and short - like flames shooting up and dying down just as quickly. Anger (Wood) within Water is liable to be precipitated by Fear, and to go on and on and on (like Water) (as we see in the world today). Fear is often cited as a particular emotion that can manifest in any phase. Water (Fear) within Fire is of course easily recognized in the sort of anxiety/palpitation syndrome that can clearly be seen as a specific type of fear.

At the very least the concept of Element within Element would serve to offset the tendency to take the Five Element attributes at their most simplistic and make the Five

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**Elemental Phases, Five Elements**, i.e. concrete things rather than forces and phases. In other words there are five times five manifestations of everything.

**Bibliography**

Matsumoto, Kiko & Birch, Stephen: *The Extraordinary Vessels*, Paradigm Publications, Brookline Ma, 1986