

## Numerology and Traditional Oriental Medicine

### Synopsis

Examination of the importance of numbers and the suggestion that they provide a basic framework for organizing Chinese concepts that serves to explain the apparent differences between these concepts at the same time provides an organizing principle.

### Numerology

Oriental Medicine is one practical application of the many concepts of Oriental Philosophy and Cosmology. Much of Oriental thought is rooted in a numerological framework.

The Tao begot one  
One begot two.  
Two begot three.  
And three begot the ten thousand [myriad] things.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 42

Oriental Philosophy and its application have largely grown by a process of syncretism<sup>1</sup>. Western thought is said to be rooted in Aristotelian logic, a thing is either 'a' or 'not a', in other words if there are two competing theories it is assumed that one is true and the other is untrue, or a third theory that resolves their conflicts is required. Syncretism allows new ideas to be absorbed without an insistence on total compatibility. Syncretism implies a level of inconsistency and we can certainly see this in practice; however, despite this Oriental philosophy and cosmology forms a very coherent structure. The structure of this cosmology is numerological. This leads to an incredibly sophisticated understanding of the phenomenological world, but also some rigidity that may be responsible for Western technology eventually overtaking the Chinese in the last few centuries.

Many aspects of OM are expressed with an explicit or implicit numerical label: e.g. Yin/Yang, Five-Phases, Five-Zang, Six-Fu, Six Pernicious influences, Seven-Emotions Eight Extraordinary Vessels, Twelve-Channels. This numbering usually conveys a meaning based upon the numerological significance of the number and relates it to philosophical concepts associated with the number.

### General Principles

The primal origin is represented by the Wu Ji symbol. ○. The empty circle represents the primal state, but should not be thought of as 'void' in the sense of an absolute nothingness. It is more comparable to the "quantum field" of modern physics.<sup>2</sup>

Odd numbers, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, are Heavenly. Odd numbers are often related to their preceding even number plus a pivot point. For example Heaven and Earth produce

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<sup>1</sup> Syncretize: attempt, esp. inconsistently to unify or reconcile differing schools of thought. Oxford Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup> See "Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Kapra.

Humanity as a midpoint (like a child). Four seasons produce a central point around which they revolve. To the Eight Trigrams is added a fifth point to produce the Nine Stars.

Even numbers 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, are Earthly; most even numbers are associated with Yin/Yang theory in various stages of development.

In numerology we can see a uniting principle as well as a basis for understanding why different ‘models’ used in different contexts will not be completely reconcilable, and yet both can be true.

## **1. Unity – The Tao**

一 One, unity

One is the first Heavenly number representing unity, The Tao. The opening passages of the Su Wen discussing the long life of people of former times, clearly roots the medicine in the philosophical principles of Taoism. Qi energy although used in medicine in the more specific meaning of physiological Qi<sup>3</sup> is ultimately another expression of this unity.

This oneness is beyond words as Lao Tzu says: ‘The Dao that can be spoken of is not the Constant Dao’. However, the poet Chi-I said.

Lao Tzu has said ‘those who know keep silent.  
Those who speak do not know’.  
If Lao Tzu is himself one that knows,  
How comes it that he wrote a book of 5000 words?

This is the fundamental dilemma; in order to understand the world and to communicate we have to use words, while all the time recognizing that they are inadequate. In Chinese medicine we talk of Yin and Yang organs **as if** such a thing had a real meaning.

Chapter 1 of the Su Wen discusses the ‘Heavenly Truth of Ancient Times’ and the importance of living in conformity with Dao.

## **2. Duality - Yin/Yang**

二 Two, the number of Earth

The first Earthly number represents duality. Yin/Yang theory is central to understanding the whole manifest world. In Oriental Medicine Yin/Yang theory is the basic principle behind all physiology (Organ and Channel theory) and diagnosis (eight principal patterns) and pathology. Every aspect of Oriental Medicine has Yin/Yang principles. All further even numbers are an elaboration of yin/yang theory. The use of double terms thus often denotes a generic inclusive or both Yin and Yang components. Zang-Fu, Jin-Ye, Jing-Shen, Jing-Mai.

**Yin/Yang aspects are so numerous only a few are shown here for illustration.**

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<sup>3</sup> That is, the Qi of the body.

	<b>Yang</b>	<b>Yin</b>
<b>Channels</b>	Yang	Yin
<b>Organs</b>	Zang	Fu
<b>Substances</b>	Qi	Xue (Blood)
<b>Pathology, nature and location of disease</b>	Full	Empty
	Hot	Cold
	Exterior	Interior
<b>Cause of Disease</b>	External	Internal

Another important symbolic representation of Yang and Yin are the broken and unbroken lines associated with the I Jing. (See Fig. 1.)

The primary symbol of the unity and its duality is the Tai Ji symbol:



Chapter 2 of the Su Wen begins to explore Yin-Yang theory.

### **Integration - 1**

Taoism has been called Dualistic-Monism. The first two numbers are central to the Taoist conception of the universe as a fundamental unity (Tao), and a manifest world that is dualistic. It is a fundamental principle that these two viewpoints are also mutually contradictory.

Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.

Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.

Tao Te Ching – Chapter One

We will return to this idea of differing viewpoints or models that are not reconcilable, at several stages.

### **3. The Three Powers**

☳ Three, Three Powers

Odd numbers (beyond 1) are often related to concepts where a Yin/Yang duality gives rise to a middle point, like two parents and a child. The Great Triad or the Three Powers: Heaven, Earth and Humanity, suggests Heaven (Yang), and Earth (Yin) producing Man (Human) between. Concepts related to the number three and its multiples show a hierarchical character. For example in medicine the Three Jiao: Upper, Middle, Lower. The Three levels of the pulses: Qi, Xue, and Zang Fu. There is also the Three Treasures Jing, Qi and Shen. Shen and Jing are the primary “before heaven” Yang and Yin aspects of our being that come together to produce the After Heaven Qi.

	Three Powers	<b>Three Treasures</b>
<b>Yang</b>	Heaven	Shen

**Yin**            Humanity  
                  Earth (Planet)

                  Qi  
                  Jing

Chapter 3 of the Su Wen explores the Heavenly and Earthly influences on humankind.

#### 4. Four Emblems

☐ Four, all around

The Chinese character is a square that is a common symbol for the ‘four square’ Earth. Yin and Yang are intermixed to produce the Greater and Lesser Yin and Yang; in the material world, this manifests as the Four Seasons.

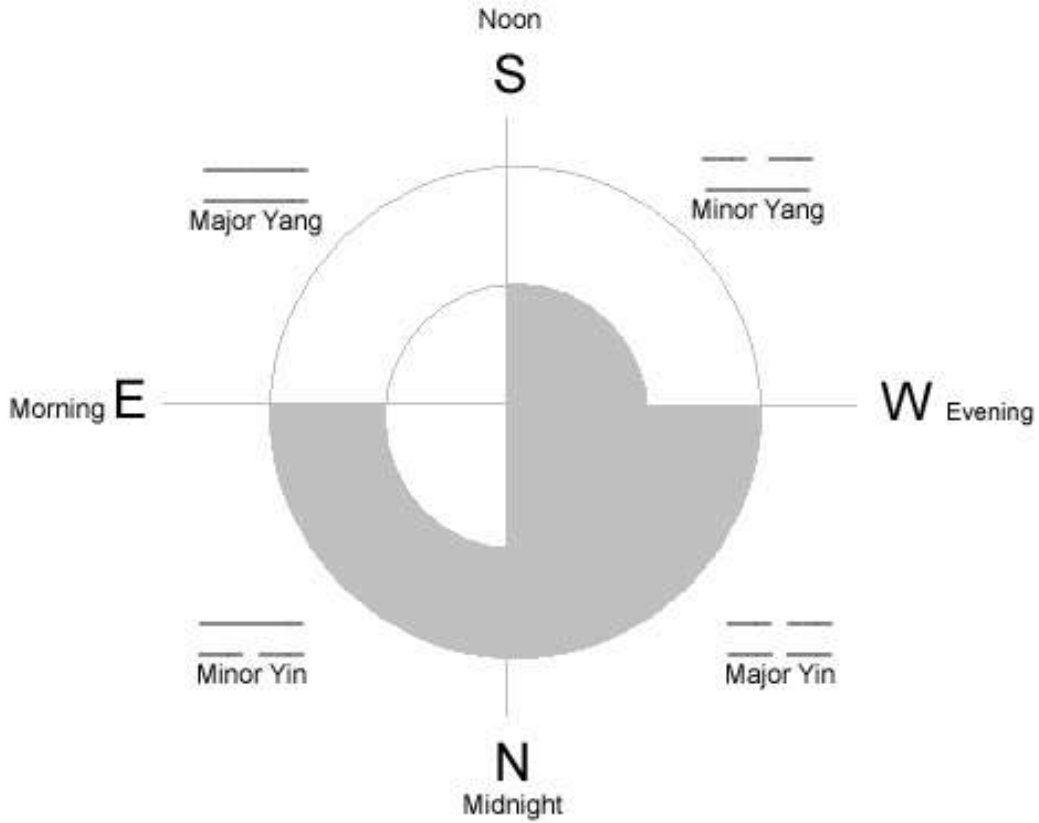
The four emblems are represented by pairings of the broken and unbroken lines. The general principle is that the lower line is the determinant. (See Fig 1)

The elaboration of dualistic principles can also be found in the writings of Empedocles (c.493c.433 BC). Empedocles explained the four Western Elements from two dualistic principles.

	DRY	WET
COLD	EARTH	WATER
HOT	FIRE	AIR

Although the idea of the Four Elements in Western thought is similar in some ways to the Five Elements of Chinese thought the fundamental difference can be understood by numerology. The Four Elements being four are more related to the world of matter. Although long superseded in Western Thought by the concepts of chemical elements, they can be seen as the four states of matter: solid, liquid, gaseous, and plasma.

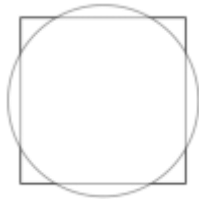
The Four Emblems can be seen as arising from a combination of the light and dark and waxing and waning parts of the daily or yearly cycle.



Chapter 4 of the Su Wen discusses the Four Seasons and leads into the Five Elements.

**Integration - 2**

'Four square' is a common expression for the Earthly realm and thus the irreconcilability of the two viewpoints the unitary/holistic-heavenly' and the dualistic-earthly is symbolized by the age old concept of 'squaring the circle'.



Fundamentally even to speak of these things is 'squaring the circle'. Lao Tzu said.

"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao"

However the poet Chu-i wrote:

'Those who speak know nothing,  
Those who know keep silence.'  
These words, as I am told,  
Were spoken by Lao Tzu.  
But if we are to believe that Lao Tzu,  
Was himself one who knew,  
How comes it that he wrote a book  
Of five thousand words."

Chi-I was speaking of the Tao Te Ching, but in a way this statement could be applied to any of the classics. We talk of Yin/Yang as having no absolute meaning, but then proceed for pragmatic reasons and for a common ground, as if there are yin organs and yang organs.

One example of 'squaring the circle' is in relation to diagnosis and treatment. Ted Kaptchuk titled his book, 'The Web That Has No Weaver'. This refers to the non linear a-causality of the Chinese World view. However, in every approach to Chinese medicine we have to make a diagnosis and refine our treatment to a root or primary 'cause'.

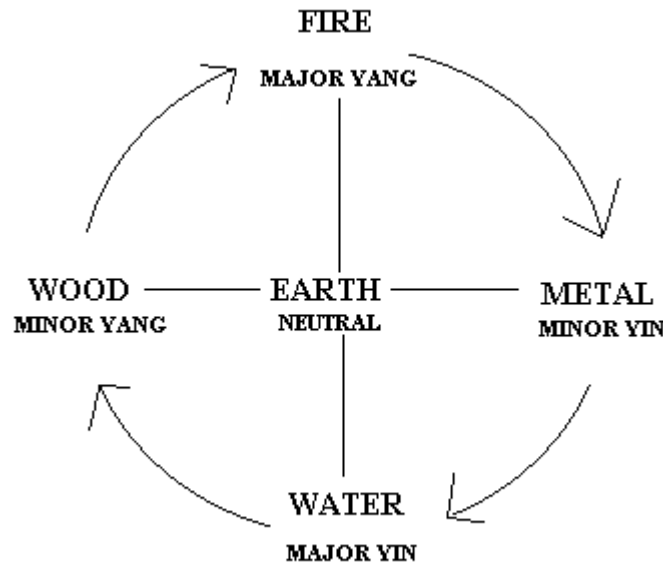
One is reminded of the old expression that 'one can not fit a square peg into a round hole'. We need to recognize that to make the various models included in Chinese cosmology and medicine completely fit would require damaging one or both.

## **5. Five Phases (Elements)**

五. Five, a perfect number

Five is the number associated with change and transformation, the Five Phases and specifically with Earth (Soil) (see below). Just as the duality of Heaven and Earth created a midpoint of Humanity; so Four Seasons revolve around a centre. It should be noted that the Five Phases are at the cardinal or transition points of the previous Yin/Yang diagram; suggestive of movement and change rather than fixed qualities.

Being Five a Heavenly number the Five Phases are more about a process of movement, and so the terms Phase or Movement are favoured over Element. Five is also representative of inner or archetypal states. In Chinese meteorology the Five Seasons are seen as "Pre-Heaven" and the Six seasons are more manifest. Five Phases in acupuncture thus lend themselves more to understanding the inner world of emotions and causes.



The association of numbers with the Elements is based upon the Tai T'ing Huai which states:

1st	HEAVEN ENGENDERED	Water	2nd	EARTH ENGENDERED	Fire
3rdly	HEAVEN ENGENDERED	Wood	4thly	EARTH ENGENDERED	Metal
5thly	HEAVEN ENGENDERED	Earth	6thly	EARTH COMPLETED	Water
7thly	HEAVEN COMPLETED	Fire	8thly	EARTH COMPLETED	Wood
9thly	HEAVEN COMPLETED	Metal	10thly	EARTH COMPLETED	Earth

The Phases are each given the number of their completion except for Earth which is given the number of its engenderment. Each Element has two numbers associated with it one Yin and one Yang. The difference between the Yang and Yin numbers is Five. Note these are the same numbers given by Fu Xi. See Fig.6

	YANG	YIN
<b>WATER</b>	1	6
<b>FIRE</b>	7	2
<b>WOOD</b>	3	8
<b>METAL</b>	9	4
<b>EARTH</b>	5	10

Chapter 5 of the Su Wen discusses the Five Zang.

### 6. Six Stages or Levels (Liu Qi).

六 Six

Associated with Yin/Yang theory, but also because it is a multiple of three it is also associated with the Three Powers and so tends to show a hierarchical nature similar to

three. Six Liu, has an application in Channel Theory, and is the basis of Chapter 31 of the Su Wen on Febrile Disease and its elaboration in the Shang Han Lun (The Penetration of Cold Diseases). The Six Stages proved to be less useful in explaining the penetration of Hot diseases, however, some have tried to apply it to the wider field chronic illness. The Shang Han Lun can be seen as the foundation text for many aspects of modern TCM.

The Six Stages have proven to be somewhat problematic. They are found in various circular arrangements and vertical orders based upon the varying interpretation of their names and functions.

The hypothesis that the tripartition was introduced primarily to satisfy the desire for numerological symmetry rather than to accommodate empirical data or previous postulates goes far to explaining contradictions and artificialities that ensue from its application.

Manfred Porkert: The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine.

However, there are two main sequences that concern us: the order that they are described in Chapter 6 of the Su Wen that reflects the arrangement of the channels on the body, and Chapter 31 of the Su Wen on Febrile disease and the Shang Han Lun use two slightly differing orders.

1. In the Su Wen Chapter 6:

		<b>FUNCTIONS</b>
TAI-YANG	Greater Yang	Opening
YANG MING	Brightness of Yang or Sunlight Yang	Closing
SHAO-YANG	Minor Yang	Pivot
TAI-YIN	Greater Yin	Open
JUE-YIN	Shrinking Yin or Terminal Yin	Closed
SHAO-YIN	Minor Yin	Pivot

2. In the Su Wen Chapter 31 on Febrile Disease

		<b>FUNCTIONS</b>
TAI-YANG	Greater Yang	Opening
YANG MING	Brightness of Yang or Sunlight Yang	Closing
SHAO-YANG	Minor Yang	Pivot
TAI-YIN	Greater Yin	Open
SHAO-YIN	Minor Yin	Pivot
JUE-YIN	Shrinking Yin or Terminal Yin	Closed

3. In the Shang Han Lun:

1.	TAI-YANG	Greater Yang
2.	SHAO-YANG	Minor Yang



3.	YANG MING	Brightness of Yang or Sunlight Yang
4.	TAI-YIN	Greater Yin
5.	SHAO-YIN	Minor Yin
6.	JUE-YIN	Shrinking Yin or Terminal Yin

It seems that each are true in their intended context.

### **Other associations of Six**

There are Six External Causes of Diseases. Being external, it is proper that there are six of them, an Earthly number.

Chapter 6 of the Su Wen introduces the Six (pairs) of Channels

### **Integration - 3**

Once again we can pause to look at how Chinese medicine encompasses models that taken together form a comprehensive whole, and yet can not be entirely reconciled with each other.

From the point of view of trying to understand how differing models that can not be completely harmonized can both be true; the concept of Five and Six and their harmonization can be found in Western esoteric traditions. Once again as with universality of Dao and the duality of the world, the 'squaring the circle', we have an image of two ideas that represent part of the universal truth that can not be harmonized. It so happens that the rule of five and the rule of six are particularly apt in symbolizing where the main schools of thought in acupuncture appear to part company. Modern TCM avoids confronting some of the difficulties that arise from differing models by de-emphasizing the Five Phases and staying within predominant Yin/Yang models.

**The Lily and the Rose – Rosicrucian Symbol**



The problems that arise due to the asymmetry in the models can be seen in the Nan Jing. Question 38 asks: some say that there are Five Zang and Six Fu, but 12 Channels; it is explained that the Xin Bao Luo and Heart are one. Question 39 asks: some say that there are Six Zang and Five Fu, but 12 Channels; it is explained that the Kidney has a dual nature: Kidney Yin and Kidney Yang.

This can be also be illustrated by comparing the pulse diagrams found in the Nan Jing and Mai Jing that are based upon the Channels and show Xin Bao Luo in the lower right position and those based upon the “Lakeside Master” that reflect an emphasis on San Jiao model and show Kidney Yang in the bottom right position.

The former relates to the Five Phases in that the ministerial fire and Earth and Metal on the right are upside down. The latter more clearly relates to the San Jiao relationships.

**Mai Jing (Pulse Classic), Wang She-He (210-285 CE).**

		<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Cun</b>	Superficial	Small Intestine	Large Intestine
	Deep	Heart	Lungs
<b>Guan</b>	Superficial	Gall Bladder	Stomach
	Deep	Liver	Spleen
<b>Chi</b>	Superficial	Bladder	Triple Burner
	Deep	Kidneys	Pericardium

**Jing Yue Quan Shu (Jing-yue’s complete book) (1624) based upon Bin Hu Mai Xue.**

	<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>

<b>Cun</b>	Heart & Center of Chest (Dan Zhong)	Lungs and Center of Chest (Xiong Zhong)
<b>Guan</b>	Liver/gallbladder	Spleen/stomach
<b>Chi</b>	Kidney & abdomen (Bladder & S.I.)	Kidney & Abdomen (L.I.)

In TCM the Kidney Yang and Fire of the Gate of Life are seen as synonymous. So for example a 'Kidney Yang Xu and Spleen Yang Xu' combined syndrome could well be seen as the same as a 'Fire not nourishing Earth' (or the inverse). The conflicts of these two differing viewpoints have been minimized in modern TCM by de-emphasizing the Five Phases.

### **7. Seven is the number of the Five Planets plus the Sun and Moon**

七 Seven, incomplete

Seven is not associated with a well-known main theory of Chinese cosmology or Philosophy. It is associated in medicine with the 7 openings in the face, the 7 Internal Causative Factors (Five Wills plus two). Seven being a Heavenly number we can see that it is right that there would be Seven Internal Causes of disease arising from the inner spirit world. Curiously seven also means an 'incomplete number' – this is certainly true in relation to the planets and arguably true in relation to emotions.

### **8. Eight Trigrams**

八 Eight.

The Chinese character represents duality, and is actually the symbol of the broken lines in the Ma Wang Dui Yi Jing.

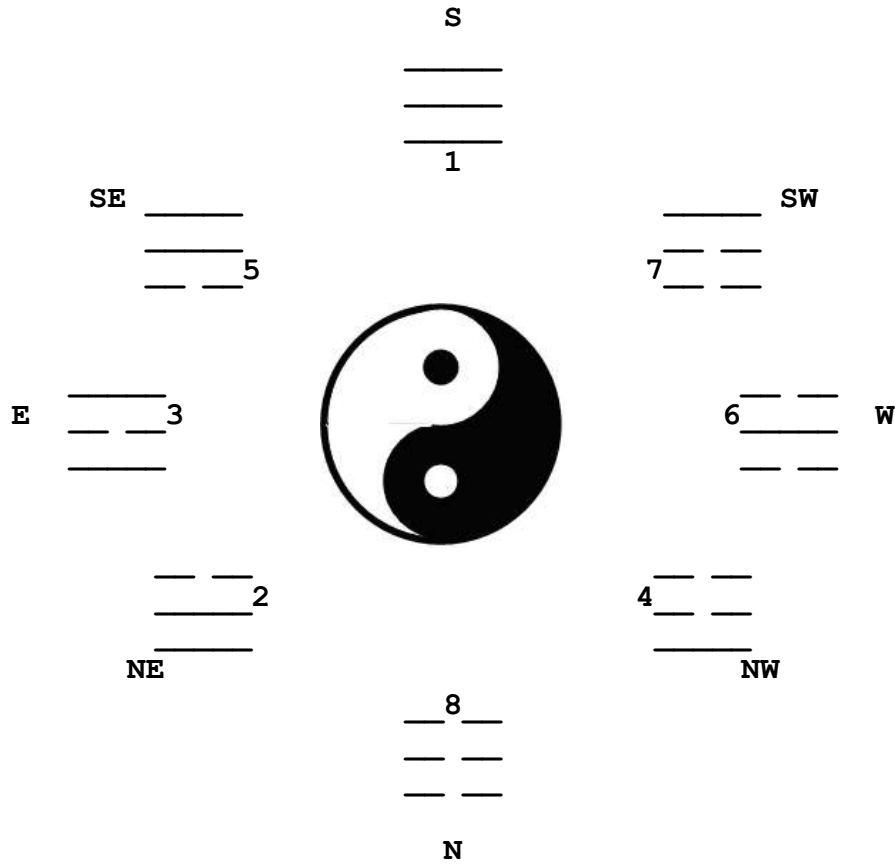
Yin and Yang are further subdivided to produce the Eight Trigrams (Ba Kua). See Fig 1. Yin Yang is applied in Clinical Practice as the Eight Principal Parameters. In Channels theory there are Eight Extra-ordinary Channels.

The Ba Gua are found in three main arrangements.

#### **Ma Wang Dui**

This is an arrangement of the trigrams which is found on charms to ward off evil it had been suggested that this may have been a scribal error. However, it appears to be the basis of the Ma Wang Dui (before 168 BC) version of the Yi Jing. The N, S, E and W points are the same as the Fu Hsi arrangement (see below), but the intermediate points are all relocated in the same order, but two positions anti clockwise. The structure of it is to place the predominant Yang trigrams on the left and the predominant Yin on the right in conformity with the Tai Ji symbol. A strong case can be made that this may be the arrangement that preceded the received version.

**Ma Wang Dui arrangement**



**Order of Trigrams in Ma Wang Dui Yi Jing**

<b>Upper Trigram</b>	☰ HEAVEN (1)	☷ MOUNTAIN (7)	☵ WATER (6)	☳ THUNDER (4)	☱ EARTH (8)	☲ LAKE (2)	☶ FIRE (3)	☴ WIND (5)
<b>Lower Trigram</b>	☰ HEAVEN (1)	☱ EARTH (8)	☷ MOUNTAIN (7)	☲ LAKE (2)	☵ WATER (6)	☳ FIRE (3)	☴ THUNDER (4)	☶ WIND (5)

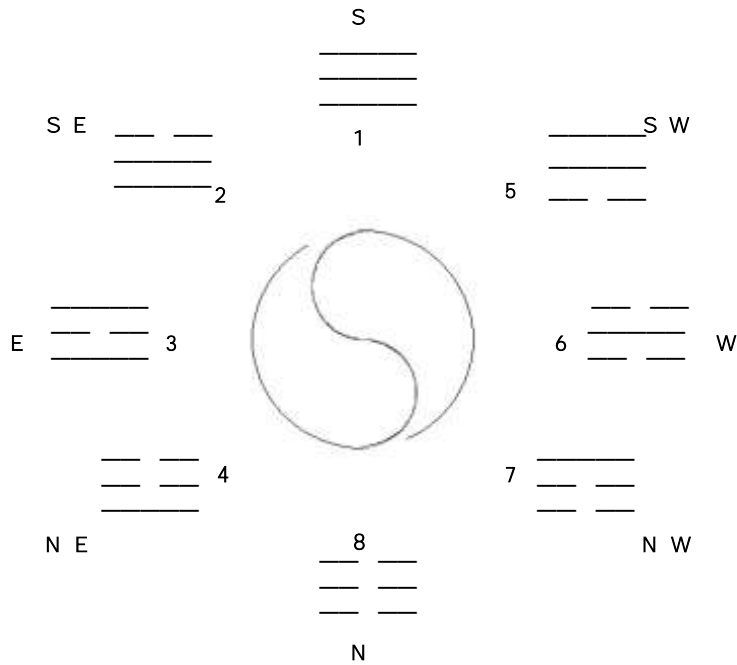
Upper trigrams are in clockwise sequence, Lower Trigrams are in alternating opposites.

2) The second is called the Fu Xi arrangement or “Before Heaven Arrangement”.

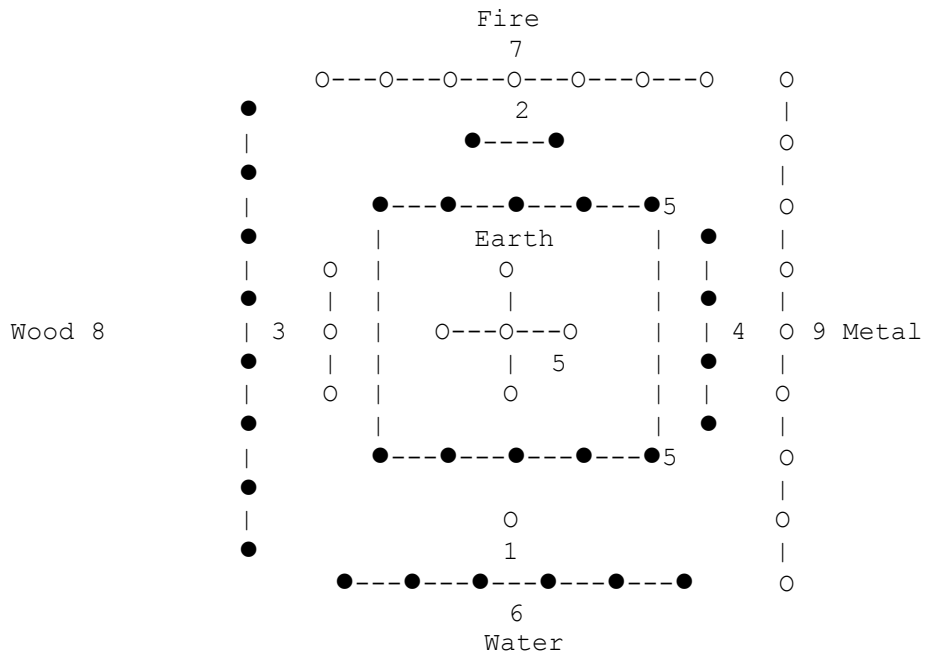
The main principles are that:

- The trigrams are arranged in opposites.
- The sequence of the trigrams can be seen to form a Tai Ji symbol.

**Fig 2 FU XI'S ARRANGEMENT**  
**Before Heaven, World of Thought - Emphasizes Polarity**



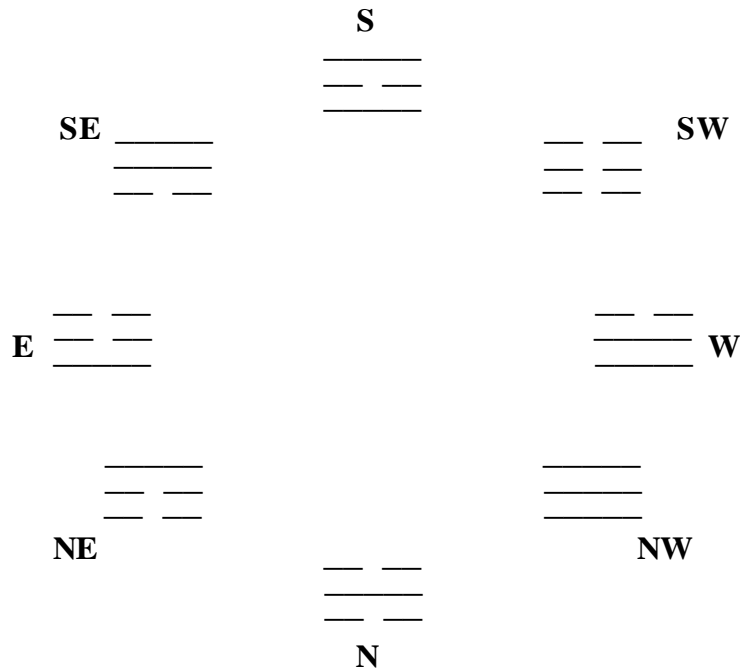
**Fig.6 THE YELLOW RIVER MAP OF FU XI**  
**Numbers are associated with Five Phases, arranged with emphasis on polarity.**



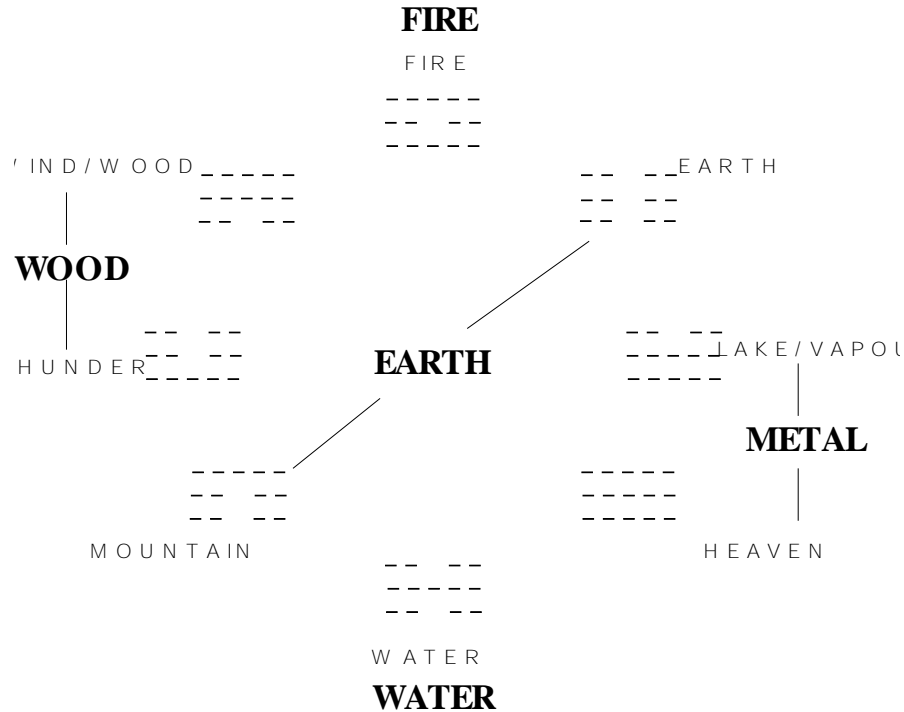
3) The Third is called the King Wen diagram or After Heaven Arrangement.  
The main principles are that:

- The trigrams are arranged with an emphasis on cyclic activity.
- The trigrams relate to the Five Phases. Earth has moved from its central position to the transition between Summer and Fall, and between Winter and Spring. In the Chinese calendar and meteorology Earth is also seen as representing the end of each season.

**Fig.3 KING WEN'S ARRANGEMENT**  
After Heaven, World of Senses - Emphasizes Cyclical and Five Phases



**Fig.7 KING WEN'S ARRANGEMENT AND THE FIVE PHASES**  
**Emphasis on cyclical activity of phases**

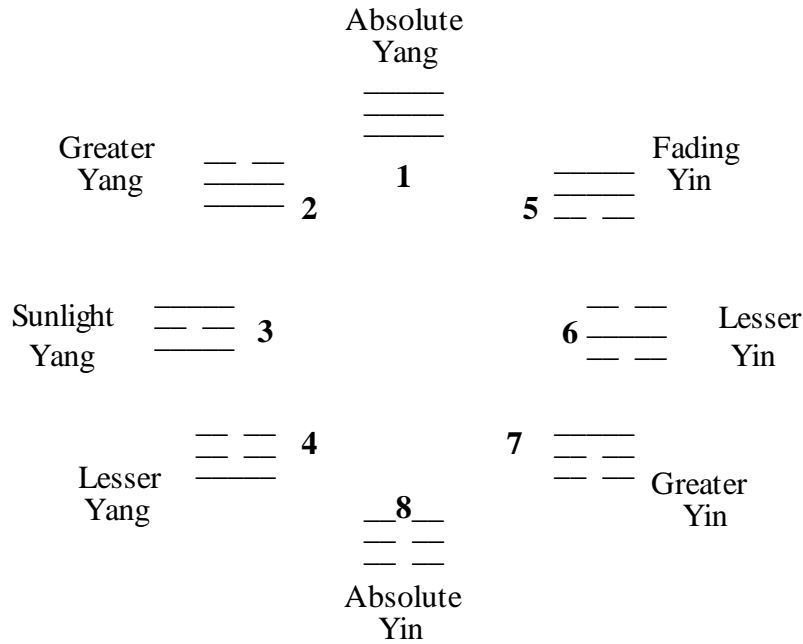


### **Fu Xi and King Wen and Oriental Medicine**

Fu Xi's arrangement can be seen as emphasizing the polarity of Yin and Yang and can be related to the Six Stages of Yin and Yang. King Wen's diagram can be seen to relate to a cyclical activity and the Five Phases. It has been suggested that the foundations of the two main strands of Oriental Medicine can be seen in these diagrams. The Yin Yang based approach that is most exemplified in Mainland China as TCM, and the Five Phase approach most developed in Japan and Korea.

**Fu Xi's and Six Stages**

**This must be considered speculative as there are differing arrangements of the six divisions.**



**Arrangement of the Six Channels**

The Channels on the lower leg (below knee) show a variation from the order of channels on the arm and the torso.

Channel Order	Shang Han Order
Tai Yang	Tai Yang
Shao Yang	Yang Ming
Yang Ming	Shao Yang
Tai Yin	Tai Yin
Jue Yin	Shao Yin
Shao Yin	Jue Yin

Peter Eckman points out that the order of penetration of disease is anti-clockwise, as one might expect for a disease process.

**9. Nine-Stars**

九 Nine, incomplete

Associated with the Eight Emblems and again as with the other models based upon odd numbers a central place completes the picture, plus a central place are the Nine Stars. China is said to have Nine Regions and the world to have Nine Continents. These are most associated with Chinese Astrology. The arrangement of numbers known in the West as the magic square of Saturn. This is also associated with the writings from the River Lo.



The arrangement of a Chinese village was eight families surrounding a center. In the center is the well. The Chinese medical classics of the Su Wen, Ling Shu and Nan Jing are each of 81 chapter (as is the Dao De Jing) and Ling Shu Chapter 77 has a discussion of this. Chapter 78 discussed the nine needles. And nine is referred to several times in the Su Wen and Ling Shu. There are nine (3\*3) pulses. There are nine organs.

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

### 10. Ten Heavenly Stems

十 Ten, complete

The first 10 numbers are considered especially important in numerology. The Ten Heavenly Stems are a system of symbols often used in conjunction with the Twelve Earthly Branches. Ten inter-relates with Five Phases, and Yin Yang. It is used in the Chinese calendar, astrology and meteorology.

<u>STEM</u>		<u>Phase</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Property</u>	<u>Season</u>
Jia (Chia)	甲	WOOD	6	YANG	Spring
Yi (I)	乙	WOOD	2	YIN	
Bing (Ping)	丙	FIRE	8	YANG	Summer
Ding (Ting)	丁	FIRE	7	YIN	
Wu	戊	EARTH	1	YANG	Late/Long Summer
Ji (Chi)	己	EARTH	9	YIN	
Geng (Keng)	庚	METAL	3	YANG	Autumn
Xin (Hsin)	辛	METAL	4	YIN	
Ren (Jen)	壬	WATER	6	YANG	Winter
Gui (Kuei)	癸	WATER	2	YIN	

## 12. Twelve Earthly Branches

The Twelve Earthly Branches are a system of symbols. They inter-relate Yin Yang, the Six Seasons, and Five Phases, it is used in the (double) Hours of the day, Chinese Calendar. In medicine there are Twelve Channels, Twelve Organs. Hence the Twelve Organs are connected to the Twelve Hours.

Branch		Animal	Hours	Phase	Number
Zǐ	子	Rat	11-1 a.m.	WOOD	1 & 6
Chǒu	丑	Cow	1-3 a.m	EARTH	5 & 10
Yīn	寅	Tiger	3-5 a.m	FIRE	3 & 8
Mǎo	卯	Rabbit	5-7 a.m	FIRE	
Chén (Ch'en)	辰	Dragon	7-9 a.m	EARTH	5 & 10
Sì (Szu)	巳	Snake	9-11 a.m	METAL	2 & 7
Wǔ	午	Horse	11-1 p.m	METAL	
Wèi	未	Sheep	1-3 p.m	EARTH	5 & 10
Shēn	申	Monkey	3-5 p.m	WATER	4 & 9
Yǒu	酉	Rooster	5-7 p.m	WATER	
Xū (Hsu)	戌	Dog	7-9 p.m	EARTH	5 & 10
Hài	亥	Boar	9-11 p.m	WOOD	1 & 6

The Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches are combined to form the Chinese Calendar cycle of sixty years.

The Eight Trigrams are paired to form the Sixty Four Hexagrams. If the four cardinal points of, Heaven, Earth, Before Completion, and After Completion are left out the sixty remaining hexagrams can be connected to the sixty years.

### Conclusion

Oriental Medicine can be seen (just like Oriental philosophy and cosmology in general) as a complete system embracing all models derived from a set of principles. These various ideas developed by a process called syncretism. This is in contradistinction to Western thought based upon Aristotelian logic in which one theory tends to be seen as superseding others. The different models that are utilized in Oriental Medicine can be seen as mutually compatible. However, it is also clear that they cannot be made entirely congruent. Therefore models based upon Five Phases are not completely rationalized with models based upon the Yin Yang and its elaborations.

**Fig 1 Elaboration of Yin Yang theory**



**Fu Xi's order is based on binary number principles.**  
 This would give a clockwise direction to the Fu Xi diagram.

