

Chi at Your Spa

By Jon Canas

How to Elevate Your Spa Therapies with Vital Energy

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Because the Body is More Than Solids and Liquids

All “energy medicines,” of which Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a great example, have a common fundamental philosophy, namely, the belief that the body is not, as we are taught in Western schools, made only of matter (solids and fluids) but also of energy. We are not talking about constant energy releases caused by the multitude of chemical activities taking place within the body. Vital energy, as it is called in Western countries, is a very subtle form of energy essential to all life forms and critical to their proper function. It is called “*chi*” in China. In Japan it is referred to as “*ki*” and in India, as yoga practitioners know, it is “*prana*.”

The traditional Chinese medical view of body parts and functions is very holistic: Everything within the body is interrelated and forms what you could call an ecological system. That is opposite to the views that have traditionally prevailed in Western medicine whereby the body is treated somewhat like a machine where a bad part can be repaired or replaced without too much concern for the effect that action might have on the rest of the body.

Inherent to that difference between the two systems is the idea of vital energy. Since it has a constant flow covering the entire body and linking all functions, nothing can be isolated or eliminated without deeply affecting the rest of the

system. That is because of the interconnection caused by *chi* flowing not only from head to toes and right hand to left hand and back, but also from the inner parts to the outer parts and vice versa. Nothing within the body is isolated from vital energy.

Energy medicine is not exclusive to Asia. Hippocrates, the great Greek philosopher and father of Western medicine, instructed physicians to find the blocking influence(s) both within a patient and between them and the cosmos in order to restore health and life. He believed nature is the source of healing, not the doctor—a fundamental truth that was lost along the way.

When ancestral energy medicine was broadly popular in China, there was an astute practice that would ensure that doctors would be focused on the health of their patients as opposed to reacting to sickness and disease as is the case today in most modern countries. It is said that the family physician was fully paid so long as all the family members were in good health. When someone became ill, the physician’s pay was reduced or suspended until everyone in the family was well again! Whether historically true or not, this anecdote illustrates the importance of preventative health care in TCM.

Internal Energetic Flow and Balance

Illness in TCM is always viewed as a disruption, an imbalance in or a blockage of the natural energetic flow, therefore a health-oriented regimentation necessarily aims to maintain or restore the internal energetic balance. A treatment might be strictly preventive or geared to addressing an existing problem.

The focus of a TCM treatment is not the symptoms as much as the root cause of the illness. In both cases, the field of attention is the energy flow and its quality and freedom of movement according to very specific pathways called the meridians of acupuncture. Treatments might involve ingesting certain herbs and other natural ingredients with specific energetic properties, or they might be at skin lev-

el where the energy flow can be accessed, in particular, when acupuncture is involved.

TCM has very ancient roots and evolved during an era when the metaphysical beliefs of Taoism prevailed in China and therefore it was influenced by those beliefs and related cultural implications. Taoists believed that to live harmoniously man needs to be in accord with the energetic laws of nature. They saw a strong parallel between the cycles of nature (such as the seasons) and the life cycle of man. They also believed that man functions as a small individual ecosystem within a larger cosmic ecosystem. The Taoism symbol is the well known and very much overused yin and yang figures forming a circle, the symbol of eternal perfection.

As TCM evolved, it came to include acupuncture, reflexology, herbal prescriptions, dietary principles, massage and *tai chi*, sometimes called “shadow boxing.” Traders, missionaries and diplomats who visited Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries returned home with reports of these classical practices. During the nineteenth century wave of immigration into the United States and Europe, Chinese immigrants brought these traditions to their new countries and Westerners began to take note of their positive results. France and Great Britain, particularly, became well informed about TCM principles as a result of their colonial excursions during this period, yet it was not until the early 1970s, after President Nixon opened diplomatic and cultural relations with communist China, that the U.S. medical community became thoroughly exposed to TCM.

In the meantime, well aware of the benefits of energy medicines, Europeans were getting reimbursed by their social security and health insurance for such

treatments. Far Eastern concepts of vital energy are now getting broader recognition in North America as reflected by the popularity of Ayurvedic treatments in spas, acupuncture practices, herbal medicines, therapeutic exercises (*tai chi* and *chi qong*), and yoga. The spa industry’s continued exploration of new therapies for wellness and skincare creates renewed possibilities for TCM to flourish in esthetics and wellness. It should because of its significant potential.

Yin and Yang

The goal of all energy medicines is the promotion and/or restoration of balance in the body’s vital energy. The complementary yin and yang forces regulate this delicate balance. Yin corresponds to principles such as inner, dense, cold, and feminine, while yang offers the opposite—outer, light, warm and masculine.

Each yin and yang energy contains the seed of the other, therefore changes (such as those in the body and in nature) are seen as the result of one energy growing while the other contracts to make room for its partner, and vice versa. When either the yin or yang becomes disrupted and overbears its energetic opposite, the balance is destroyed and trouble arises. The dynamic interaction of these two forces is reflected in the cycles of the seasons, the human life cycle, and other natural phenomena.

The Five Elements

The ancient Chinese saw how the cycles of the seasons profoundly impact everything from weather to plants and crops, animals, and even human mental well-being. They surmised that to each season corresponds a specific energy influencing all life forms.

They concluded that in addition to the cyclical movement of yin and yang, there must also be the energies of the seasons. They subdivided yin and yang into five Phases or Elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. But why five rather than four to correlate with the four seasons? The answer is symptomatic of Chinese thinking: How could there be an energy—say the energy of the Spring, named Wood—

suddenly becoming Fire, the energy of the next season? Would that huge change take place in the one minute before midnight on the last day of Spring? That could not be as it is contrary to the yin/yang principle. It led them to surmise that there must necessarily be a period of transition between all seasons when the energy of the season wanes and becomes transformed into the energy of the next season.

This transition period must be repeated four times a year and became known as the Earth “season.” A little arithmetic made it clear that each energetic season would be about 72 days and that the Earth season would occur for 18 days four times a year. Each Phase/Season/Energy/Element has its specific characteristics whether they expressed as yin or yang, or as energy or matter. They affect all things including our body and all skin conditions.

The workings of the Five Elements became the subject of a very detailed Five Element Law with specific application to every domain. In the Western world, that Law is more skeptically referred to as the *Theory* of the Five Elements (or Five Phases).

The Five Pairs of Organs

For cultural reasons, traditional Chinese physicians did not engage in dissection of cadavers as systematically and thoroughly as did the European Renaissance doctors. As a result, Western doctors developed great knowledge of the anatomy of the dead body (absent energy) while the Chinese focused on learning more about the functions of the living human body. They conceptualized the workings of the human body based on its functions rather than the details of its anatomy.

A system of five pairs of organs resulted with each pair corresponding to the energy of an element driving a yin organ in tandem with a yang organ. A balance within each pair is required for optimum health. Further, a balance within the five pairs must also prevail according to the Five Element Law.

Colors and Light

Whether it is in matter (pigmentation) bouncing off light or pure energy (light), colors are associated to specific energies defined by frequencies and wavelengths. Light, the purest form of energy, divides naturally into seven component colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet). Those seven colors correspond to seven major energetic centers (chakras) in Ayurvedic medicine. Five of those colors also correspond to the five elements of TCM. Each of the five colors is in energetic harmony with the pair of organs corresponding to each of the five elements and their specific energetic function. As a result, colors, both as matter but most potently as energy, become tools of energy medicines.

Many Naturopathic doctors practice light therapy. Their result will depend on their knowledge, of course, but also on the energetic quality of the light color they use. Since each color does not come in one or a few frequencies but as a wide range of frequencies, the therapeutic quality of a light color is strictly a matter of the frequency range it carries for each color used. From an energetic point of view, the therapeutic value of light depends on the fullness of the frequency range corresponding to that color. For example, the first chakra stores the energy of red light. It means that it needs and uses the full range of frequencies naturally corresponding to red.

An LED type of light is designed to carry only a few frequencies and cannot, by definition, carry the necessary range of required frequencies for good energetic work. Likewise, working on an acupuncture point such as a “stomach point” on the face, the esthetician needs the full spectrum of frequencies that naturally constitute yellow light and not simply the targeted

frequency produced by an LED that would belong to yellow.

The Body and the Five Elements

The following is a brief description of the Five Elements and their relevant components:

- **Wood:** Energy of the “energetic” Spring and of the color green; the season of bursting yang energy resulting in a yin contraction. The weather warms up. The rate of reproduction in the plant and animal kingdoms rises and so does the energy level in most people. Green symbolizes the sprouting of new life during springtime. The corresponding organs are liver (yin) and gallbladder (yang).
- **Fire:** Energy of the Summer and of red; this season is marked by yang reaching its fullest while yin is at its lowest point. The weather is hot (symbolized by the color red). The pair of Fire organs is heart (yin) and small intestine (yang).
- **Earth:** Transitional season when the energy is said to return back to Earth four times a year for 18 days in-between each season to transform into the energy of the next season; it is in harmony with the color yellow. The corresponding organs are spleen (yin) and stomach (yang).
- **Metal:** Energy of the Fall; its colors are white and/or blue. During fall, yin expands and yang winds down. Cooler weather returns and both animals and plants prepare for the slowdown during the next season. The organs are lungs (yin) and large intestine (yang).

- **Water:** Energy of Winter; the colors are black and/or violet. It is the peak of yin and the lowest point of yang. The weather is at its coldest. Nights are longer and plant and animal activity decreases. The organs are kidney (yin) and bladder (yang).

Is Your Skin Wood or Earth?

Given this short overview of the Five Elements Theory, how can it be applied to esthetics? In energy medicines, all esthetic conditions are deemed to result from an internal energy balance or imbalance.

The Five Elements classify all possible skin conditions into five groups and help anticipate the likely direction of the aging process. The skin condition as well as the body shape can also tell when and where there is an energetic lack or excess affecting any of the five organic energies. The following is an overview of the five groups of skin conditions:

- **Wood:** A Wood energetic imbalance often causes excessive oil production in the skin. Wood skin conditions also include blackheads and hyper-pigmentation.
- **Fire:** A Fire imbalance can be seen as excessive perspiration, red, sensitive and blotchy skin. It also includes couperose.
- **Earth:** An Earth imbalance results in toxin buildup. This toxicity appears on the skin as blemishes. It also includes acne and/or large pores.
- **Metal:** A Metal imbalance often means a skin lacking oxygenation and is deficient in minerals which causes poor water retention. Metal conditions include dull, lifeless skin.
- **Water:** A Water imbalance usually produces water dehydration that results in fine lines, wrinkles, and lack of skin tone. Additionally, puffiness and/

or dark circles under the eyes points to a Water energetic imbalance.

Put “Energy” In Your Spa

As a reflective organ, the skin provides useful indicators of our internal *chi*. Esthetic conditions such as excessive oiliness, blemishes, dryness, fine lines, are signs pointing to energetic imbalance(s).

So how can equilibrium be restored?

How can the root cause of the symptom(s) be addressed?

According to TCM, the energetic qualities of particular herbs, essential oils, and other natural products including clays and trace elements can help rebalance *chi* when applied topically.

Acupuncture, manual massages, and therapeutic baths can be enhanced by modern tools. They include work on acupuncture points with proper light therapy machines and the application of energetic skincare products to correct esthetic manifestations as well as their inner cause. Energetic products get their properties from blends of high grade essential oils. They become an essential part of “energetic skincare” based on the coherent use of the proven Five Element Theory.

If you’re thinking of integrating TCM into your treatment menu, make sure the product line goes beyond good marketing talk and that the method is reflected by the products. Very few companies offer products rich in natural ingredients with high-grade blends of essential oils that have the propensity to balance vital energy. The mere presence of essential oils in a product is not enough to assume it will work under TCM principles. Of course, “active” ingredients must be natural and present in certain concentrations. Of course, synthetic oils have no energetic properties. The energetic blends are mixed with

other ingredients with value added such as clays and algae to achieve potent results.

Light Therapy and TCM

Other treatment methods that are consistent with TCM include well selected, quality herbal supplements and lymphatic stimulation.

Lymphatic “drainage” as a type of massage helps remove energy blockages and promotes the flow of *chi* throughout the body. Light therapy, a relative newcomer to the quiver of spa technicians has great promises.

Affordable light machines using full spectrum colors from cold light and limited to the visible spectrum of frequencies are a very potent yet very safe tool. They make it possible to practice energy work without heating or puncturing the skin, without infrared or ultraviolet, and without any pulsed or laser frequencies. Consequently, no special license is or should be required. This offers great potential for spas in need of differentiation from their competition. It is a particularly good alternative to spas not keen to become a “medical spa” under medical supervision in order to survive.

In Conclusion

In TCM, the goal is to address not only the manifestation but also the cause of the problem. Skin conditions, especially recurring ones, can be very helpful in understanding the state of wellness of an individual.

American consumers have shown a growing interest towards non-invasive, results oriented modalities, particularly when they also contribute to harmonizing the flow of vital energy, a precondition to good health.

Who doesn’t want glowing skin and to feel great at the same time? As the spa industry becomes more competitive and more regulated, the benefits of TCM will become clearer.

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Jon Canas is president of Laboratoire Gibro, S. A., a Swiss laboratory and exclusive manufacturer of the PHYTO5 energetic, natural, and holistic skincare line. Its unique method is entirely based on Traditional Chinese Medicine principles. The method, known as the Phyto-biodermie method, combines concepts of energy with European herbal pharmacopoeia. It offers a complete range of naturally energetic products for face, body and scalp divided into five sub-lines, one for each of the five groups of skin conditions. It also has optional proprietary equipment (for lymph drainage, light therapy and biostimulation). Its award-winning Chroma-Lift™ facial is a comprehensive, non-invasive lifting facial that also uses lymphatic stimulation and light therapy. For more information, call 888-715-8008 or visit <https://www.phyto5.us>

Jon Canas is also the author of the book *Energetic Skincare, Naturally*. He has written over a dozen trade articles, and is a contributing author to the *Milady's Advance Esthetics* textbook.

We are guided by many authors when writing on the subject of vital energy but, in particular, by these authors and their books:

- Elias, Jason, and Katherine Ketcham. *The Five Elements of Self-Healing: Using Chinese Medicine for Maximum Immunity, Wellness, and Health*. New York: Harmony, 1998. Print.
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- Gerber, Richard. *Vibrational Medicine: The #1 Handbook of Subtle-Energy Therapies*. Rochester, VT: Bear &, 2001. Print.
- The abundant writings of Deepak Chopra, M.D. including:
Chopra, Deepak, and David Simon. *Grow Younger, Live Longer: Ten Steps to Reverse Aging*. New York: Three Rivers, 2003. Print.

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