

Plant-Based Watercolour Workshop: A Journey into Traditional Chinese Medicine

Introduction: In this workshop, you'll dive into the world of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) through the making of plant-based watercolour. Learn about the healing properties of plants and discover how TCM's core concepts such as the balance of Yin and Yang, the Five Elements, and Qi, can inspire your artistic practice and enhance your well-being.

Yin Yang: The Foundation of TCM



The concept of **Yin and Yang** is a foundational principle in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Chinese philosophy. It represents the dualistic nature of reality and how opposite forces or elements are interconnected and interdependent.

The symbol of Yin and Yang consists of a circle divided into black and white swirls, each containing a dot of the opposite colour. This represents the idea that within each force is the seed of the other, illustrating their interdependence and balance.

Fundamental Principles

- **Duality:** Yin and Yang are two opposing but complementary forces. They are not absolute opposites but are relative and define each other. Each contains a seed of the other, symbolizing balance and interdependence.
- **Interconnection:** Yin and Yang are interconnected and continuously influence each other. Change in one force will lead to changes in the other, reflecting the dynamic nature of balance.

Notes:

Characteristics of Yin and Yang

Yin	Cool, passive, dark, feminine, internal, receptive, and nourishing.	Night, winter, water, cold, rest, and inward activities	Yin is related to organs like the Liver, Heart, Kidneys, Spleen, and Lungs, which are involved in nourishing and maintaining balance within the body.
Yang	Warm, active, bright, masculine, external, assertive, and transformative.	Day, summer, fire, heat, activity, and outward expression	Yang is related to organs like the Gallbladder, Small Intestine, Bladder, Stomach, and Large Intestine, which are involved in transformation and external activities.

Yin Yang in Balance and Health

- **Dynamic Balance:** Health in TCM is viewed as a state of balance between Yin and Yang. An imbalance between these forces can lead to illness or disease. For instance, an excess of Yang might cause conditions characterized by heat or inflammation, while an excess of Yin might lead to cold or stagnation.
- **Diagnosis and Treatment:** TCM practitioners assess the balance of Yin and Yang in a patient through various diagnostic methods, such as pulse taking and tongue observation. Treatments are then aimed at restoring this balance through acupuncture, herbal medicine, dietary recommendations, and lifestyle changes.

Cyclic Nature

- **Change and Transformation:** Yin and Yang are dynamic and constantly changing. They follow natural cycles, such as the changing seasons, day and night, and the life cycle. Understanding these cycles helps in predicting and addressing health issues according to the time of year or stage of life.
- **Complementarity:** Yin and Yang are complementary forces that support and regulate each other. For example, the warming effect of Yang is necessary to counteract the cooling effects of Yin, and vice versa.

Practical Applications in TCM

Diet: Foods are categorized as either Yin or Yang. For instance, cooling foods like cucumber are considered Yin, while warming foods like ginger are Yang. A balanced

diet aims to harmonize these properties according to individual needs and seasonal changes.

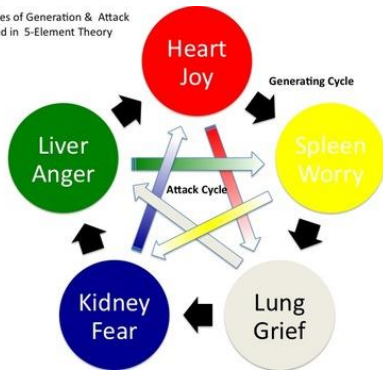
Lifestyle: Activities and habits are also analyzed through the lens of Yin and Yang. For example, excessive physical activity might increase Yang, while too much sedentary behavior might increase Yin. A balanced lifestyle seeks to align with the body's needs and natural rhythms.

Treatment: TCM therapies such as acupuncture and herbal medicine aim to balance Yin and Yang in the body. For example, acupuncture points might be chosen to strengthen Yin if there is a deficiency or to invigorate Yang if there is excess cold.

In summary, the concept of Yin and Yang in TCM reflects the fundamental principles of balance, interconnection, and dynamic change. Understanding and applying these principles helps maintain health and harmony by addressing imbalances and promoting overall well-being.

Five Elements Theory

The Cycles of Generation & Attack described in 5-Element Theory



In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), colours are thought to have significant impacts on health and are closely linked to the five elements theory, which is foundational in TCM.

The **Five Elements Theory** is a fundamental concept in TCM and other Chinese philosophical systems. It provides a framework for understanding the interactions and relationships between various aspects of the natural world and the human body. The theory divides phenomena into five elemental categories: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. Each element is associated with specific organs, emotions, colours, seasons, and other attributes.

Notes:

Using the 5 Elements to Achieve Balance

Balance by Colour

ELEMENT COLOUR	ORGAN	BALANCE
Wood (Green)	Liver/Gallbladder	Incorporating green colours in your environment or clothing can support the Liver's function, promoting emotional balance and the smooth flow of Qi and Blood. Green is also believed to help with feelings of anger and frustration.
Fire (Red)	Heart/Small Intestine	Red is used to stimulate energy and warmth. Surrounding yourself with red or incorporating it into your life can invigorate the Heart, enhance joy, and support mental clarity. It can also help in balancing emotions related to joy and enthusiasm.
Earth (Yellow)	Spleen/Stomach	Yellow is thought to provide grounding and nourishment. Using yellow in your environment or diet can support the Spleen, improve digestion, and help with worry and overthinking. It is believed to enhance mental clarity and emotional stability.
Metal (White)	Lungs/Large Intestine	White is linked to purity and clarity. It can aid in respiratory health and support the Lungs, helping with grief and sadness. White colours or elements in your surroundings can help with mental clarity and emotional release.
Water (Black or Blue)	Kidney/Urinary Bladder	Black or dark blue represents depth and calm. These colours can support Kidney health, enhance vitality, and help with fear and willpower. They promote rest and rejuvenation.

Balance by Flavour

Flavours are also associated with the Five Elements and their corresponding organs. In combination with other TCM theory, they are used to treat disease in dietary therapy and herbal medicine approaches:

ELEMENT & FLAVOUR	ORGAN	BALANCE
Wood (Sour)	Liver/Gallbladder	Sour flavours, found in foods like citrus fruits and vinegar, can stimulate the Liver and support its function. They help with digestion and can aid in managing emotions like anger and frustration
Fire (Bitter)	Heart/Small Intestine	Bitter flavours, such as those found in bitter melon and certain herbs, can help to cool and calm the Heart. They support the Heart's function and can help with feelings of excessive joy or overexcitement.
Earth (Sweet)	Spleen/Stomach	Sweet flavours, from foods like sweet potatoes and grains, nourish the Spleen and support digestion. They help with mental and emotional balance, aiding in reducing worry and enhancing overall nourishment.
Metal (Pungent)	Lungs/Large Intestine	Pungent flavours, such as those found in garlic and ginger, can help to clear the lungs and improve respiratory function. They assist in managing emotions related to grief and support the immune system.
Water (Salty)	Kidney/Urinary Bladder	Salty flavours, found in seaweed and salt, can nourish the Kidneys and support water metabolism. They help to balance fear and support overall vitality and energy levels.

Practical Applications

Diet: Incorporate a variety of colours and flavours into your diet to support the balance of the Five Elements. For example, adding green vegetables (Wood) or incorporating sweet foods (Earth) can help maintain harmony in corresponding organ systems.

Environment: Use colours in your home or workspace that correspond to the elements you wish to support. For instance, adding green decor can promote Liver health, while red can energize and uplift the space.

Emotional Balance: Choose colours and flavours that align with your emotional needs. If feeling stressed or anxious, soothing colours like blue and calming flavours like sweet may help restore balance.

Takeaway: *In TCM, balancing through colour and flavour is part of a broader approach to maintaining health and harmony. By aligning your environment and diet with the principles of the Five Elements, you can support overall well-being and foster emotional and physical balance.*

Creativity: The Role of TCM Organs

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), creativity is viewed through the lens of energy flow, organ health, and emotional balance. Creativity is considered a reflection of the harmonious functioning of various organs and the smooth flow of Qi (vital energy) and Blood in the body.

ORGAN	ROLE
Heart (Xin) 心	Shen (Mind and Spirit): The Heart houses the Shen, which encompasses the mind, consciousness, and spirit. A well-nourished Heart supports mental clarity, inspiration, and emotional balance, all of which are crucial for creativity. When the Heart's Shen is balanced, it facilitates a free flow of creative ideas and self-expression.
Liver (Gan) 肝	Smooth Flow of Qi and Blood: The Liver is responsible for the smooth flow of Qi and Blood throughout the body. This flow is essential for mental agility and emotional balance. When the Liver is functioning well, it supports flexibility in thought and emotional resilience, which are important for creative processes.

<p style="text-align: center;">Kidneys (Shen) 肾</p>	<p>Storage of Jing (Essence): The Kidneys store Jing, which provides the foundational energy for the brain and overall vitality. Strong Kidney energy supports mental stamina and cognitive function, enabling sustained creative activity and insight.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Spleen (Pi) 脾</p>	<p>Production of Qi and Blood: The Spleen transforms food into Qi and Blood, which nourish the body and mind. Good Spleen health ensures adequate energy and nourishment for mental activities. It also influences concentration and mental focus, which are important for creativity.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Lung (Fei) 肺</p>	<p>Respiratory and Emotional Influence: The Lungs, through their role in respiration, impact overall energy levels and emotional health. Proper lung function supports energy flow and can influence the emotional and psychological aspects of creativity.</p>

Emotional Balance

- **Emotional States:** As noted above, TCM links specific emotions to each organ (i.e. the Liver is related to anger, the Heart to joy, the Spleen to worry, the Lungs to grief, and the Kidneys to fear). Emotional imbalances can affect creativity. TCM aims to address and balance these emotions to support a healthy creative flow.

Flow of Qi and Blood

- **Balance and Harmony:** Creativity in TCM is closely tied to the balanced flow of Qi and Blood. Blockages or deficiencies in these vital substances can hinder creative expression. Practices like acupuncture, herbal medicine, and Qi Gong are used to restore balance and promote the smooth flow of energy, thereby enhancing creativity.

Takeaway: A Holistic Approach

- **Integration of Body, Mind, and Spirit:** TCM views creativity as an integrated aspect of overall health, where physical, emotional, and mental well-being are interconnected. A holistic approach ensures that all aspects of health are in balance, thereby fostering an environment conducive to creative expression.

Making Plant Based Paint

What you will need:

- Small jars/containers for the “paints”
- Various plant materials
- Knife and cutting board to chop up plant materials
- Small pot to boil water
- Paper (watercolour paper is best since it can handle more liquid)
- Brushes

Quick guide to colours:

Yellow: onion skins, marigold flowers, turmeric, dandelion flowers

Orange: carrot roots

Brown: coffee (instant is easiest), tea, dandelion roots, walnut, oak acorns,

Purple/pink: red cabbage (ph dependant), beet root, hollyhock flowers, strawberries

Black: charcoal (charred wood)

Grey: ash or soot

Blue/green: blueberry, red cabbage (ph dependant), Japanese indigo, Woad

Green: spinach leaves, grass, yarrow flowers

The process:

After you’ve gathered materials, chop up the plants (if it is a flower use the petals) and put it into the individual jars. Then add boiling water and mix and crush the plants to help release the pigment (a mortar and pestle might be helpful). Some plant materials are more stubborn, so if the pigment isn’t coming out it might require the extra step of boiling it in water on the stove.

Next, assemble the jars of watery pigment, grab a brush, some watercolour paper, and start painting! Because the colours more subtle, it might take a couple layers to build up the intensity you want.

ENJOY!

