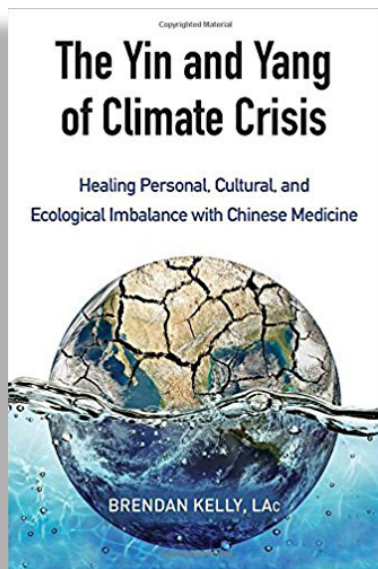


## BOOK REVIEW



The Yin and Yang of Climate Crisis: Healing Personal, Cultural and Ecological Imbalance with Chinese Medicine

North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA

2015

249 pages

ISSBN

Paperback: 9781583949511

Ebook: 9781583949528

### *The Yin and Yang of Climate Crisis: Healing Personal, Cultural and Ecological Imbalance with Chinese Medicine* by Brendan Kelly, LAc

Reviewed by Elizabeth Sommers, PhD, MPH, LAc

Practitioners of Asian and Chinese medicine will appreciate the perspectives presented in *The Yin and Yang of Climate Crisis: Healing Personal, Cultural and Ecological Imbalance with Chinese Medicine* by Brendan Kelly, LAc. Using the principles of the Five Phases (also known as Five Element Theory), holism, and *yin* and *yang*, the author offers comprehensive descriptions of the changes in earth's environment from perspectives that can particularly resonate with students of Asian philosophy and medicine.

Recognizing that organs are more than discrete bundles of tissue, Kelly demonstrates the fundamental connectedness of humans, living creatures and the planet. He draws from the mind/body/spirit comprehensive approach that we know from traditional Chinese medicine by using theories of correspondence to illustrate issues such as desertification of land, heat melting the polar ice caps, and the depletion of oil. For example, each organ comprises a system that can be associated with emotions, parts of the body, seasons of the year, physical environment, and time of day. These commonalities are juxtaposed with the reductionist world-view that fails to appreciate the paradigm of connectedness or correspondence. It is precisely this reductionist approach that has been mis-applied by under-estimating the role of human activity in influencing climatic change.

Offering illustrations from case studies, Kelly recognizes that the body can be viewed as the microcosm for the planet. Excess of *yang* energy can manifest in both the body and in the environment. In the body, a patient might experience hot flashes, restless sleep, tinnitus, or severe headaches in a pattern demonstrating excessive Heat energy. At the planetary level, excessive *yang* energy manifests as glacier melts or the acidification of the ocean. A correlated depletion of *yin* could manifest as earth's lessened ability to promote balance in the face of increasing greenhouse gases. The cycles of creation and constraint, as demonstrated by Phase Theory, are disrupted and nature struggles to maintain a balance.

Kelly's interpretations of the Five Elements elegantly illustrate natural resources. He describes the water element as having both *yin* and *yang* properties. We are reminded that the kidneys are simultaneously the most *yin* and the most *yang* of all organs. *Yin* quality is demonstrated by water's mutable nature of flexibility and humility. Yet we all have seen evidence of the *yang* forcefulness of water—think of flooding, tsunamis or tropical storms. Through the force of time, water wears away rock.

The kidneys also house the body's *jing*. Our *jing* is our generative or creative force, coming from our hereditary lineage or ancestral energy. Each individual's unique manifestation of mind, body and spirit arises from our *jing*. The nature of our *jing* plays a role in determining our physical

“Just as we have learned to crave more and more, he believes that we can learn a new lesson based on conservation, reducing, reusing and recycling. We can turn the anger and irritation of the Liver into the strategizing and thoughtful approach of ensuring sustainability.”

health and longevity and is also a wellspring of energy that we can tap into during times of illness or chronic stress. We can cultivate our *jing* through practices like tai qi or qi gong.

The kidneys of Mother Earth house the planet's *jing*, which is how Kelly refers to oil reserves. The *yin* nature of oil reveals itself as dark, heavy, and concentrated. Burning oil can result in a global *jing* deficiency. This deficiency becomes more strained and extreme through the necessity of accessing oil through deep-delving into the earth in locations that are remote, such as the Arctic and deep regions of the ocean.

Thus, a *jing* deficiency for an individual will look like depletion (e.g., profound lack of energy, inability to recover from illness). Culturally, depletion of *jing* might be described by failing to appreciate that widespread over-use of oil could result in fundamental imbalances in the earth. This kind of arrogance is also coupled with the extremes of capitalism and a materialistic culture that fails to appreciate the toll that our collective lifestyle takes on the planet.

The concept of continuous growth can be illustrated by the wood element—the liver. Springtime is the phase of the annual cycles that corresponds to the liver. The tendency to overgrow—to expand excessively—can be exemplified by the concept of an endless spring. Just as the energy of spring gives forth to summer, the energy of the Liver needs to be channeled and budgeted toward nourishing the heart. Stagnation in overgrowth translates into diminished energy for the heart function.

By linking the cycle of the Five Phases to economics, Kelly explores some uncharted, and vastly under-appreciated, territory. The planetary challenge of climate change is intimately connected to society's endless demand for development. Just as we have learned to crave more and more, he believes that we can learn a new lesson based on conservation, reducing, reusing and recycling. We can turn the anger and irritation of the Liver into the strategizing and thoughtful approach of ensuring sustainability.

Kelly reflects on his motivations for writing this book: “Soon after graduating from Chinese medicine school, it became clear to me that the heat and inflammation that were so common in the treatment room was directly connected to the rapid warming described by climatologists. With over 20 years' involvement in ecological issues, it was also clear that the holism of Chinese medicine had much to offer the discussion about creating long-term sustainability. After several years of

*research about climate change and classical and contemporary Chinese medicine, I felt compelled to write about how what was happening within us and within our culture was mirrored by what was happening with the climate.”*

The book's final chapter, “The Opportunities of Climate Change,” returns to the concept of seasonality. The Sheng cycle is a way to visualize the continual change as displayed in the natural world. Just as each season evolves and sets the stage for the next season, the energy of the earth—and the energy within each one of us—needs to be allowed to change and reach fruition. Constraint results in stagnation and imbalance.

Kelly reflects a positive, constructive and optimistic outlook in this work. He recognizes that, in the deepest part of midnight, morning begins. The crisis of climate change can galvanize us to life-saving action that transforms into the opportunity for healing. The book is a significant contribution to public health because of its appreciation of the linkages that connect individuals, populations, and the global community. This is an important book that can broaden our understanding and motivate us to action. It is a most welcome approach to translating our medicine into creating and promoting policies that can heal ourselves and our planet.

Elizabeth Sommers, PhD, MPH, LAc is based in the Integrative Medicine and Health Disparities Program of Boston Medical Center. She has published in the areas of acupuncture detoxification, health economics, and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Dr. Sommers contributes to *Acupuncture Today*, *Meridians: The Journal of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine*, and *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. As a founder and former chair of the American Public Health Association's Section on Integrative, Complementary and Traditional Health Practices, she currently serves on APHA's Governing Council. She is committed to ensuring that healthcare including wellness is a right not a privilege.