

HUMAN EVOLUTION BASED UPON OLD CHINESE PATTERNS? RATIONALLY REALIZING PSYCHOSOCIAL EVOLUTION THROUGH A WELL-BALANCED POLARITY IN THINKING, BEHAVIOR AND FEELING

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ABSTRACT. *Polarity regarded as a cosmological principle and applied to psychology enables to describe stressful or healthful dynamics. Old Chinese Yin-Yang interpretations encourage to look upon this subject also from a western point of view by including a further approach from Hegel's western philosophy: Thesis – Antithesis – Synthesis. In this article common western terms of everyday thinking, feeling and behavior are listed up as complementary polar pairs. On this base different sorts of polar dynamics (causae formales) can be distinguished. In nature opposites do not exclude each other but are understood as partners, the well-balanced cooperation of them enables human evolution step by step (the symbol of Taiji illustrating a possible causa finalis), whereas polar dynamics like misbalances, deficits of both sides, extreme fluctuations or conflicts between the poles can lead to (severe) personal and psychosocial problems. This can be interpreted as aberrations or negative causae finales. Examples from everyday life are given.*

KEYWORDS: *Polarity in Psychology, polar dynamics, Yin–Yang principle, Thesis – Antithesis – Synthesis, subjective balance, polar deficits, fluctuations, conflicts, misbalance; psychosocial evolution, psychosocial stress, health, Salutogenese, self-evaluation, self-experience*

Contents

Introduction: Yin–Yang – Wu–Xing

1. Back to the roots – Polarity as a tool to scale psychosocial health or health risks
2. Viewpoints of Polarity in Psychology
3. Dysfunctional, stressful polar constellations
4. Healing strategies in mild cases of dysfunctional polar patterns
5. Evaluation of disturbed polarity in our everyday life

Conclusion: Well-balanced thinking, feeling and behavior as a personal and general “Salutogenese” concept

Introduction: Yin–Yang – Wu–Xing

Polar thinking and the 5 phase's rotation system – both concepts emerged in Old Chinese Philosophy – can be understood as cognitive methods. They also are the naturalist principles (which originally were observed in nature): **Polarity and Diversity**. While yin and yang signify *polar* aspects (originally referred to the change, for example, between darkness and light, or active and passive); *diversity* in nature was generally observed between five (*wu*) changing conditions (*xing*), which usually are signed in dictionaries and literature as five different elements, or five different stages of motion in nature.

Living in accordance with these natural patterns and searching for the good balance and cooperation among all these conditions was recommended as an essential condition for maintaining health (Nguyen Van Nghi, 1977).

In accordance with the main principles of the Biocosmological Association (and its neo-Aristotelian foundation) – similarly Old Chinese Systems do underline Polarity (and diversity) as *universal principles of life*. In this article polar aspects are applied to psychology from my western point of view. Whereas the specific different psychological terms here serve as *causae materiales*, their polarity and the difference among them can be interpreted as natural driving efficiency (*causa efficiens*). Patterns of polar interactions can be regarded as *causae formales*. Well-balanced cooperation of polar functions and natural sequences among the five phases follow possible evolutionary aims (*causa finalis*) whereas other kinds of dynamics mentioned underneath are easily misleading. The following interpretations of polar interactions resemble to a main ethical principle of Aristotle according to which virtues are described in middle (*mesotes*) between two false extremes (Kunzmann et al., 1991).

My work consists of the two parts. The second article (planned for the next issue of “Biocosmology – neo-Aristotelism”) will describe how different polar conditions influence each other by the use of Old Chinese *five phases (elements) rotation model (wu xing)*¹. Suitable western terms (that are placed into a rather complex Old Chinese Model) can help to revive it and adjust this Model to the modern level of scholarly knowledge – to describe the individual's healthful evolution (ontogenesis). In *wu-xing* all the four Aristotelian causes can be registered in combination (comparable with the notion of *hylomorphism*).

A possible synthesis of *yin–yang* and *wu–xi* is illustrated in the work as a *Taiji*-symbol in rotation (see Picture 1). Applied to psychology it can be discussed as a comprehensive healing model already described in my German Book “Psychosomatische Vorsorgemedizin”, edited by Springer, Wien, New York, 2008.

¹ My interpretation from the western standpoint is needed due to the lack of suitable terms for today's understanding of psychology in Old Chinese tradition.

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Old Chinese patterns of Health for today's psychology
(中国古代心理学原型)



Picture 1. Old Chinese patterns of Health for today's psychology
Taiji combined with Wuxing

1. Back to the roots – Polarity as a tool to scale psychosocial health or health risks

Polarity as a basic phenomenon in nature was observed by ancient Greek Philosophers e.g. by Heraclitus and Aristotle (Kunzmann et al., 1991). In the modern era, German Idealism of the 18th century is notable, by developing dialectic philosophy and putting into practice the study of polar aspects. Due to dialectical principles, cooperation of polar moments can lead to further developed stages, including a synthesis of Thesis and Antithesis like it was described by *Fichte*, *Schelling*, *Hegel* (Kunzmann et al., 1991; Pietschmann 1980). In Old China this way of thinking had a much longer tradition. Yin and Yang in their healthful cooperation was always regarded as a principle of health, as underlined in Hoang Ti Nei King going back at least to the early Han period, according to legends back over 3000 years (Nguyen Van Nghi 1977; Porkert 1982; Granet 1963, etc.).

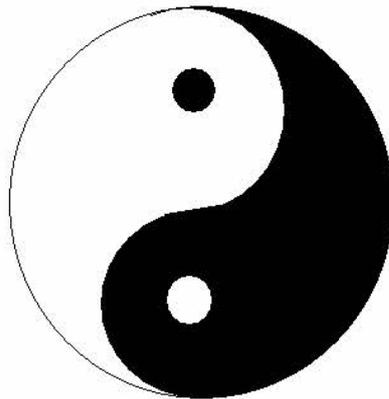
In connection with my medical study of acupuncture I got acquainted with this aim of balancing yin and yang functions to promote health. So I made up my mind to apply this old principle to psychology. Knowing that we usually experience a large number of different opposite functions not only in our body but also in our thinking, behaviour and emotions. I placed suitable common western psychological terms into the Old Chinese Yin–Yang system. This approach has appeared to be a simple but essential method to describe mental health, individual health risks and illnesses in details.

Whereas in medical physiology health can be measured in terms of the CGS system (cm, gram and seconds), scales for psychosocial health are much more

difficult (for, the latter depends on the individual's specific cultural background and environment). For example, in western countries personal or social health is described by the abilities to realize healthful contacts, feeling of self-confidence, working-ability, adaptability, personal satisfaction, self control, sense of coherence including comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, etc. (Lorenz 2005; Frischenschlager and Kropiunigg, 2002; Jork and Peseschkian, 2003; Pritz and Stumm, 2007). The complexity of above mentioned abilities can be reduced, firstly by dividing them into pairs of simple polar elements (as already underlined by Schulz von Thun, 1989). This can help us to analyze complex disturbances like anxiety, sleeplessness, or other possible psychosocial stress factors.

Openness towards several opposite poles and the subjective feeling of a well-balanced flow between different polar conditions can be realized as a possible individual scale, serving our interpretation of e.g. good adaptability. In contrast, psychosocial stress is usually connected with typical bipolar malfunctions like deficits of both sides, disturbed balance, extreme fluctuations or conflicts between opposite poles. These malfunctions (in more detail) are described in chapter 4.

2. Personal Balance – easy in theory, difficult in practice



Picture 2. Taiji Symbol

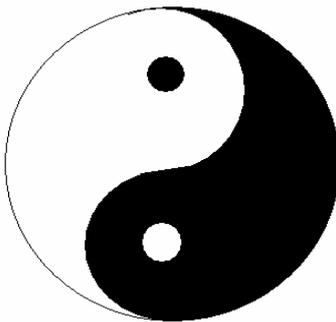
This principle is illustrated by the well known Old Chinese Taiji Symbol – probably one of the eldest health symbols in our world. Applied to Psychology, it designates the necessity of a balanced flow of possible constellations of opposite functions, including our thoughts, our behaviours and our emotions. Taiji resembles to the western philosophic idea of Synthesis – in contrast to a common principle “either – or” in western cultures and their mindset, which often leads to further conflicts, illnesses and early death. The Yin nucleolus inside of the Yang area and vice versa symbolizes that opposite aspects (besides stimulating each other) should keep an eye upon each other. This especially refers to life situations, when one side is actually dominating. In practice this means: never succeed without a possibility to give up; make no critique without a possibility of generosity, etc.

In everyday life many different polar aspects (see next chapter) are to be considered and put into subjective balance. Openness towards contrary aspects and personal feelings of balance among such bipolar constellations in our thinking, behavior and emotions build up a good healing atmosphere for our body, for our mind and for our social lifestyle. In western philosophy and natural sciences the mental principle “either – or” has to be substantiated and developed.

The principle of cooperation between opposites states: One part (pole) should come to being (domination) after the other. Both parts (poles) should generally act in a well-balanced form. Therefore, each part (pole) should dominate by turns, but not exclude each other thus generating conflicts, including the suppression of unconscious forces and impulses. In turn, well adapted balanced flows between the polar parts certainly helps to promote the health of our body, our thinking, feeling and social activities provided with enough energy (the latter resembles C.G. Jung’s appeal to revive animus in anima and vice versa).

3. Viewpoints of Polarity in Psychology

Psychosocial aspects of polarity



- Thesis – Antithesis (main term + contrary)
- active – passive
- towards oneself – towards others
- positive – negative

Picture 3. Psychosocial aspects of polarity

Realizing a psychological approach (and applying western point of view), four categories of polarity can be considered. Firstly, for a most general category aimed at the differentiation of polar aspects the notions **Thesis** (*any main term*) and **Antithesis** (its positive opposite) are proposed. These basic substances (Thesis and Antithesis) in their natural cooperation and by combining both (polar) aspects develop towards a **Synthesis** (a higher stage of being) achieved through the integration of both polar constituents. For example: Well coordinated working (understood as Thesis) and resting (understood as Antithesis), one after the other, are important partners to reach good efficiency (Synthesis). Or, healthful contacts and their effects (synthesis) do not only need to be together (thesis) but also a time to withdraw, to be alone (antithesis).

Secondly, the polar category – **passive–active** – is actual. It plays an important role in everyday life. For instance, to be cared – caring for somebody; or being treated – treating, handling, etc.

The third category of polarities – *centripetal (towards me)* vs. *centrifugal (towards others)* – can be practiced more or less harmoniously. The examples are: working for oneself – working for others, helping; being self critical or rather criticizing others; etc.

In most cases the fourth polar category is actual: *positive – negative* (like being diligent – or lazy, etc.). This category reflects the results of more or less balanced (or disturbed) polar activities in our thinking, feeling or behaviour.

The next three tables (tables 1, 2, 3) list up common examples of polar constellations (see middle rubrics). They concern our thinking, acting and emotions in everyday life. Each table lists up a few examples of different types of polarity: *thesis – antithesis*, in table 1; *active – passive*, see table 2; *towards others – towards oneself*, table 3). The right and left rubrics in each table points out typical exaggerations of the relevant side, which are connoted as common stress factors. This view comes close to Aristotle's ethics (*mesotes*) but additionally underlines the dynamic aspects between the different types of poles.

Table 1.

Polarity Thesis – Antithesis
Examples in every day's life

Exaggeration	Thesis – Position	Antithesis Opposite	Exaggeration
clinging	together	alone	lonely
suspicious	caution	trust	careless
pedantic	critical	generous	uncritical
fanatic	willing	content	aimless
aggressive	succeed	give by	helpless
hectically	speed up	slow down	too slow

Table 2.

Polarity active/yang – passive/yin

Exaggeration	active	passive	Exaggeration
unhappy love stalking	to love looking for contact	being loved being contacted	no own love being stalked
overprotective	caring	being cared	being spoiled
too severe	criticize	being criticized	always feeling guilty
too dependent	to need	to be needed	too powerful,
always active	to treat; succeed	be treated; give by	always passive
over adapted	coordinating	adapting	uncoordinated

Table 3.

Polarity centripetal /rather yin- centrifugal/ rather yang
Examples in every day's life

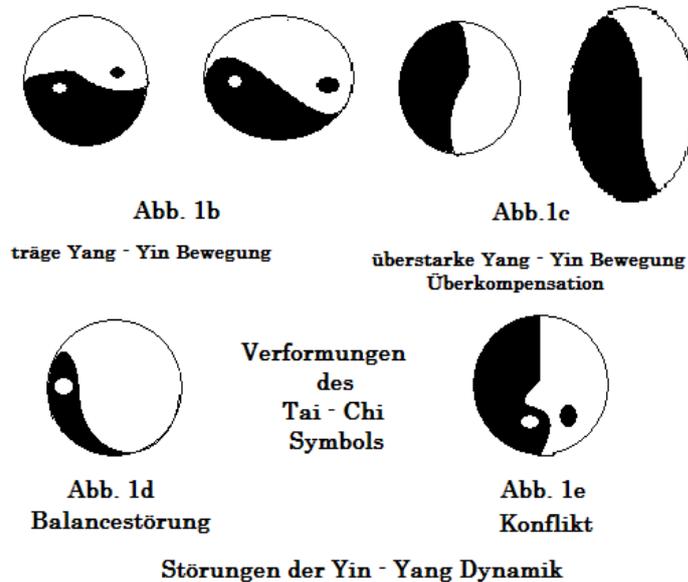
Exaggeration	Towards me	Towards others	Exaggeration
only self attended hypochondriac	attend to me, own sensibility	attend to others, being empathetic	only attending to others;
spoilt	caring for me	caring for others	over protective
over responsible; compulsive	my duty; my fault	others duty; fault	irresponsible
stressing myself	expect from myself	expect from others	stressing others
reckless competition	working for me	working for others	being abused
no time, no space for others;	Time, space for me;	Time, space for others;	no time, space for me;

The advantage of this access to psychological problems is its simplicity by the use of common terms, which everybody can understand. Dividing complex personal stress into such simple polar elements can be a first step to cope with a rather complex problem (for example anxiety or sleeplessness) and helps us to help ourselves gradually. (See over next chapter). The same access is also interesting for pedagogic purposes – in addition to the specific language, the specific terms and the specific way of thinking commonly used among western clinical psychologists nowadays.

4. Dysfunctional, stressful polar constellations

Common types of polar malfunction

- Reduced polar activity (both polar aspects are deficient)
- Severe fluctuations of polar functions
- Misbalance
- Polar functions in conflict



Picture 2. Common types of polar malfunction

In contrary to the health principle of Taiji a lack of both sides is leading towards “neither – nor” constellations. Also extreme fluctuations, severe misbalance and possible conflicts of polar aspects usually are signs of personal and psychosocial stress. When ignored, such constellations can become worse or go along with psychosomatic or mental illness – as evidenced by numerous examples from everyday life:

A: Reduced polar activity of both sides can be illustrated by a rather flat sinus wave between Yin and Yang. It signalizes reduced activity, general deficits of both aspects – despite different theories about causes how they might have come into being (due to constitution, or suppressed by the domination of other aspects, or by environment, or as the result of exhaustion after prolonged polar conflicts or severe polar shifting). Any help is based upon supporting both deficient aspects by bringing them into mind, and, further, by trying out their realization in a life practice. It is desirable to conduct such a practice with a psychotherapeutic support.

For instance, cold-hearted people (with a reduced ability of empathy) rarely experience their own feelings. Lazy people seldom work for others and for themselves. Spoilt children neither care for others, nor for themselves. During an existential crisis there exist neither personal wishes nor personal satisfaction. In some severe cases of burnout the exhausted patients might be neither able to work, nor to rest.

B: During *severe polar fluctuations* (illustrated by too high amplitudes between Yin and Yang in picture 7) both partners overlook their counterpart during their own activity (no Yang nucleolus in the Yin area and vice versa). Such conditions of overcompensation of deficits need more consideration (a deeper understanding) on the necessity of *both physiological* counterparts, as listed up in the middle of two rubrics in the tabled illustrations 4, 5 and 6.

The following examples can be taken into consideration. Emotional instability often goes along with ‘black – white’ judgements, like exaggerated criticism towards one side and blind generosity towards others. Some patients blindly trust into conventional (scientific) medicine and fully distrust any other complementary method. In other cases, medical doctors can experience it the other way round. Phases of feeling medical incompetence (e.g. during an attack of anxiety) can be combined with the phases of the raised competent control of feelings. Long lasting suppression or states of inability can be followed by severe aggression. Workless inactivity sometimes is overcompensated by aggressive hyperactivity.

C: Misbalance between two counterparts probably is the most common type of impairments of healthfully personal balance. In picture 7, misbalances are illustrated by unequal sizes between Yin and Yang. The dominant aspect usually supervises over the deficient one. To correct the imbalance, naturally, the weaker side ought to be supported but not reduced (criticise) the dominant partner. Misbalance of polar components leads to symptoms as described in the left or right rubrics of the tables 4, 5 and 6.

These are the some examples for *misbalances*: People whom we dislike we are usually criticized but do not get praise or generosity from our side. For that reason, raised claims in connection with reduced personal satisfaction or contentment easily furthers personal stress. In turn, spending much more time to work without having enough time to rest easily leads a person to exhaustion. Domination of consummation over personal income or saving usually leads to sorrows (depths). During aggression personal succeeding is dominant whereas altruistic activity is forgotten. In social competition, recklessness often works for oneself, thus dominating over the work for others (aid).

D: Polar components in conflict. During conflicts the polar counterparts fight with each other – a situation which often is followed by stagnation. Both sides look upon each other “with enlarged nucleoli” – one side blocking the other. During conflicts such “either – or” thinking categories hinder healthful solutions concerning the principle: “one after the other”. Prolonged conflicts of polar functions have the tendency to become dominant aspects in our thoughts or behaviour. Conflicts waste a

lot of time and energy, thus suppressing other, often important life aspects. In the outcome, conflicts sometimes end up in deficits of both fighting poles.

Here are some examples for *polar functions in conflict*: Conflicts between wishes of binding and detaching can easily hinder contacts. Conflicts between work and private life might cause burnout – damaging in the long run both privacy and work ability. Conflicts between self-accusation and accusing others can hinder decisions and thus can counteract psychosocial development in other aspects. Conflicts between sexual lust and strict rules of allowed ways of satisfaction may lead to dominant forms of (sexual) abuse or end up in frustration with the loss of both: lust and satisfaction.

5. Healing strategies in mild cases of dysfunctional polar patterns

According to an old good principle in acupuncture (in cases of misbalance) the weaker side rather should be strengthened than criticizing (reduction of) the dominant pole. Ways of strengthening the weaker part (pole) can be: just bringing it into mind by reading, by being discussed, by trying to remember it from own life, own experiences or the weaker side can be supported by phantasm (illusion). In some cases the weaker aspect can be eventually underlined by the use of hypnotic techniques.

In cases of several misbalances among many different polar constellations it is better to aim balance rather among slightly disturbed polar conditions, whereas the more severe ones firstly should only be registered. Some of them can perhaps be discussed with good friends, but in more severe cases they need to be treated by professional psychotherapy.

As mentioned above, in cases of severe fluctuations the normal polar aspects in the middle of the table ought to be strengthened or underlined, as well as in cases of deficiency of both parts.

Also in cases of conflicts (e.g. hate and love) both sides ought to be respected in their milder forms (e.g. antipathy–sympathy). One aspect is allowed to be realized beside or after the other aspect, taking into consideration that one side can be more experienced in some concrete respect, while the other counterpart in another connection.

6. Evaluation of disturbed polarity in our everyday life

I am attaching an evaluation sheet used in my own medical practice to distinguish common stress factors of everyday life, which easily can stand behind chronic diseases and psychosomatic symptoms and often hinder recovering in time. Some of these imbalances, severe fluctuations, conflicts or deficits can also be leading aspects of recognized mental illnesses.

In the given table 4 the individuality of polar dynamics of our everyday thoughts, behavior and emotions is evaluated. In most cases, we probably find ourselves far enough from the extreme situations that are listed up in the right or left extreme columns, shifting near to the middle (signed as the zero position), and

sometimes much closer to one pole. The variant is also when a person experiences extreme fluctuations or (if only position zero is marked), and when none of the addressed possibilities are existent in our life (in the sense of a “neither – nor” answer).

For better visualization the following table illustrates different possibilities reflecting the variants of filling the (see the table 5).

Table 4.

General information for patients

<i>Weight scaling between two extreme positions</i>	3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Normal shifting between two poles away from extremes			x		x		
Closer to one side		x			x		
Much closer to one side and away from the other side		x					
Usually fluctuating		x				x	
Often extremely fluctuating	x						x
Both sides play no role in my life, do not exist				x			
I don't know; I don't want to answer; no comment							

Working out this evaluation of polar elements in our thinking, our emotions or our behavior helps to understand our lifestyle. Such an understanding opens different forms of applications – according to individual wishes:

1. *Stimulating our self-experience – precisely for private use.* Just dealing with a variety of alternatives can help to identify leading aspects in our life without overlooking their polar partners, which still have a weak role in our self wellbeing, up to now.

2. Some items might encourage us to realize a *confidential discussion with close friends, partners or with our medical doctor* to find out whether they are severe stress factors and thus go along with a higher risk for physical discomfort or illnesses.

3. Systematic evaluation of disturbed polarity – usually accompanying individual psychosocial problems – can help *to prepare for professional psychotherapy.*

Evaluation of polar aspects in my life

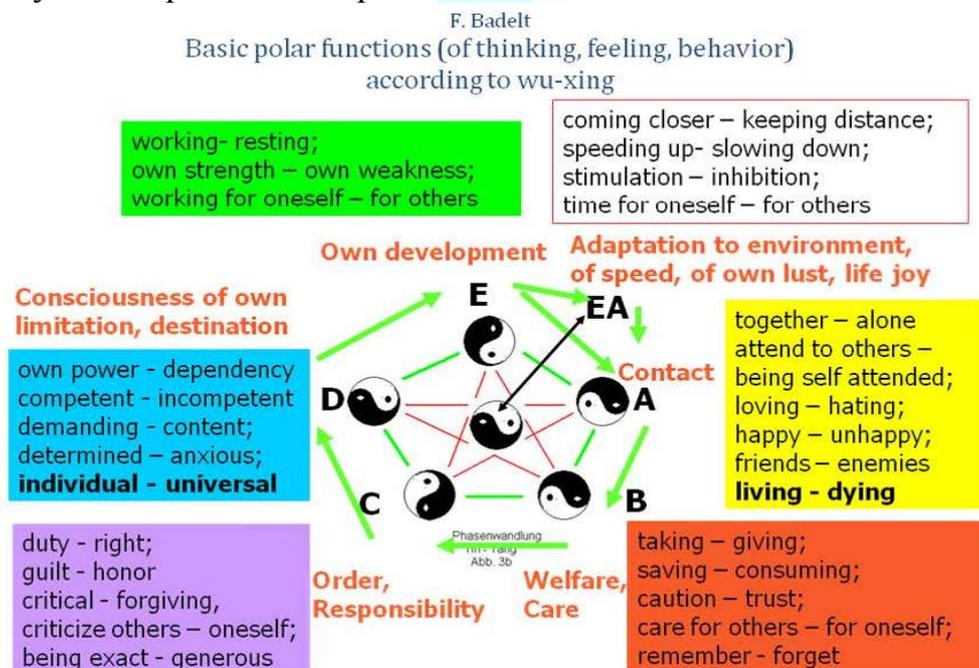
Weight scale	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	Weight scale
very happy, joyful				0				very unhappy, disappointed
feeling bounded too tight				0				feeling very lonely
high spirited, euphoric				0				sad, dull; monotonous life
very empathetic				0				cold, unfeeling
oversensitive (against pain)				0				very compassionate, full of pity
many friends				0				no friends, many enemies
only loving others				0				only loving myself
very creative, full of ideas				0				no own ideas, unimaginative
rich of experiences				0				lack of experiences, events
dominating				0				feeling suppressed
powerful, independent				0				totally dependent
egocentric				0				selfless
fanatic, narrow minded				0				anxious, frightened; aimless
self expectations too high				0				expecting too much from others
very much tension, stress				0				unmotivated, indifferent
full of claims, demanding				0				easily content, modest
high self-consciousness				0				low self-consciousness
much own development				0				always reserved, holding back
very aggressive, irritable				0				very shy, helpless, hesitating
feeling very strong				0				feeling very weak
always working; ambitious				0				no work; rather lazy;
quarrelsome, arguing				0				never arguing, avoiding quarrels
competitive, usually winning				0				mainly yielding; often losing
primary working for myself				0				primary working for others, helping
lecherous; joyful				0				inhibited, shy, no life joy
easy laughing, humorous				0				nothing to laugh, very serious
lack of personal distance				0				very reserved
being too fast, too early				0				being too slow, too late
always in a hurry				0				easily feeling bored
very flexible, adaptable				0				inflexible, lack of adaptability
eloquent, quick witted				0				speechless
more living in future				0				more living in the past
very optimistic				0				very pessimistic
primary consuming; depths				0				primary saving, much property
incautious, easily trusting				0				overcautious, suspicious
giving more than taking				0				taking more than giving
caring only for others				0				caring only for myself
very generous				0				very economical, rather stingy
careless; rather spoiled				0				overburdened
easily forgetting				0				grumbling
scrupulous, very conscientious				0				unscrupulous, irresponsible
pedantic, very strict, sincere				0				rather inaccurate, sloppy, insincere
primary self critical				0				primary criticizing others
concerned about own duties				0				concerned about own rights,
very critical, accusing				0				rather forgiving, reconciling
always strict to common rules				0				no order, only own orders counting
socially honored, advantaged				0				socially dishonored, discriminated

Conclusion: Well-balanced thinking, feeling and behavior as a personal and general “Salutogenese” concept

Readers of this article might have the impression of being confronted with a too simplified sort of psychology neglecting individual causes and social circumstances. Nevertheless for didactic reasons simplifying is helpful to some extent. Though we know, that in reality polar dysfunctions usually are combined and weighted individually, this method tries to advance towards personal balance step by step. Because of many interrelations (also described in the next article by the *wu-xing* pattern) each little gain of subjective balance will help to regain more balance in different other fields. Complex problems like psychosomatic symptoms, impaired adaptability, impaired realistic self confidence, impaired ability of contact, work etc. need coping step by step. Any strengthening of a too weak aspect leads to improved resilience.

Of course we all know that polar disturbances of our thoughts, emotions and behaviour like illustrated above usually do not exist alone and influence each other. In this connection my western conception of the *wu-xing* model will bring some order into the huge variety of polar constellations. The Old Chinese *wu-xing* Model – extended and adapted to our time by placing suitable headlines and terms into it – will show up possible ways of interrelations. Considering the components of the different (divers) phases the *wu-xing* pattern also allows indirect coping of single polar disturbances. Who ever is capable of the German language can read more about it my book “*Psychosomatische Vorsorgemedizin*”. An outline of it is presented here in two articles of this journal.

A preview how psychosocial functions can be placed into a western extended “*wu-xing*” system is presented in picture 3:



Picture 3. Basic polar functions of thinking, feeling, behaviour according to wu-xing

Western medicine has the tendency to divide the aetiology of illnesses into physical and psychological causes, whereas a psychosomatic approach tries to keep in mind both aspects. Medical psychology also is mainly illness orientated. Thus, patients often avoid consulting psychologists or psychotherapy what sometimes even considered shameful. Moreover, psychotherapy is in many cases not refunded by the insurance systems. In our culture any talk about gastric disorders, hypertension, infections, heart diseases, etc. is much more familiar and not associated with shame than expressing one's own fears, anxiety, sorrows, anger, unhappiness, etc.

During my medical education and training there were no disciplines that could teach and explain how to maintain the individual's psychosocial health. Psychiatry was taught without being based upon such a fundament – probably because of a lack of worthy health theories.

Due to the understanding of man as the psychosomatic unity, each preventive medical understanding ought to substantively consider psychological Health concepts (“Salutogenese”). Herein, the use of a simple language is needed which is understandable to each sane patient. Besides philosophical speculations, this article is realized as a contribution in a higher sense, prepared by a medical practitioner for patients and for myself – inasmuch as medical doctors earlier or later will fall sick too.

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