

# (8 EXTRAORDINARY VESSELS) AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE 7/8 YEAR LIFE CYCLES

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Although the use of the *qi jing ba mai* (8 extras) is very widespread, not many people pay deep attention to the philosophical statements that they might represent. This article is an attempt to look at the *qi jing ba mai* as the basic scheme of human life. The ideas presented here are based on the work of Daoist priest Jeffrey Yuen and my own understanding and experience.

The 7/8 year cycles are described in *Su Wen*, chapter 1. Most acupuncture textbooks quote these cycles as a description of the rise and fall of the person's *qi* as one moves through life. Following the 7/8 year cycles of physical energy comes the part that explores immortality, the ability to have descendants past normal child bearing years. *Su Wen*, chapter 1, basically tells us that we can reach spiritual immortality through our spiritual accomplishments and can have descendants past the normal reproductive age (in the form of students/disciples). It is hinted which is the ideal state of our lives: becoming a sage or an 'authentic' person.

In looking at the cycles of life we need to first take a look at the very core concept of life itself. What is this process we call life? What are its prerequisites? This process is the domain of the 8 extra channels, the *qi jing ba mai*.

What are some of the assumptions we can make about life? First, we acknowledge that to be born is to start the process toward death: there is no such thing as a life that is not defined by physical death. This is clear to all of us from our own observations and it is clearly stated in the 7/8 year cycles.

We can also say that the purpose of life is to convert *jing* into *shen* through the transmuting power of *qi*. This rather technical phrase basically means that what we do in life is take our physical form (*jing*) and through the process of interaction in the world (*qi* - creating connections, relationships), we accumulate spiritual or mental experiences (*shen*). We can say this in terms of the interaction of the *hun* and the *po* also: it is the coming together of the physical *po* and the ancestral/spiritual *hun* that creates the animation of life. Without the *po*, we cannot experience physicality, while without the *hun* we cannot achieve animation and individuation. It would appear that by the time we die most of us would vote for an enriched *hun* while for the most part our physicality has been weakened; our *po* is ready to be recycled into the earth.

And since life is about being *yang*, interacting, and accumulating experiences and learning, one of the biggest obstacles in our lives is our rigidity. When we build habits that are too strong, we become afraid of change, we become rigid, we are no longer interacting and learning in a free manner but we are controlled by our attachments (which have been created through habituation): aging is often a 'hardening of the attitudes'. This is why we say that wind is the spearhead of all disease, because wind is change, and when we are unable to move with change we develop disease.

The domain of the movement of life, the actual interaction, is generally within the domain of the regular meridians, as these are the conduits of *ying qi* and blood. The pattern, that which contains the code for the vast potential of life, is in the

domain of the 8 extras, as they are conduits of *yuan qi* or *jing*.

*Qi jing ba mai* can be translated to mean 'extraordinary' 'conduits' '8' 'animations'. *Qi* means strange or wondrous (like 'wow' coming out of one's mouth). *Jing* means meridian, or regulator of a territory. Eight is a number which represents the primal organisation of life prior to turning it outwards. It is a basic number like the eight directions of the compass. *Mai* means pulsation or movement in vessels. In other words these vessels are about something very basic and very wondrous: that is, they are about life itself (life is wondrous). The 8 extras are conduits of an energy that is not meant to deal with ordinary circumstances, but they represent the primal, innermost organisation of life. They are called upon under extraordinary circumstances (life-threatening), while the regular channels are arranged around 12 and 5 phases and represent our walking through everyday life.

In looking at the 8 extras we can see the basic structure for the destiny of human life.

First we have a blueprint - the predetermined destiny. This is the ancestral *chong*. This *chong* is the equivalent of the Tibetan idea of the central channel which runs in the centre of the body (between the *ren* and the *du*). This blueprint then gives rise to the *ren* and the *du*, *yin* and *yang*, resources and construction. Another interpretation of the *chong* as we know it (an extension of the *ren*, lateral to it on the kidney line) is that it is the result of the fusion of *yin* and *yang* (*ren* and *du*): *yin* and *yang* coming together to create the fusion/explosion/surge of life. The character *chong* is of regular movement of a person lifting something heavy, thus the notion of dashing, bursting, or surging. Either interpretation shows us the *chong* as representing the space between heaven (*yang*, *du*) and earth (*yin*, *ren*), thus representing the seed of the human. Thus the *chong* represents a sense of self, how do I relate to myself, and whether I am comfortable with who I am (my blueprint). When I am not comfortable with who I am, I might have problems in assimilating (digestion and respiration) things into myself or in creating something out of myself (reproduction), the textbook symptoms ascribed to the *chong*.

The *ren* represents our resources. This is the channel of the human as s/he carries the burden of life. It represents our resources in life, as well as resources received in very early childhood in bonding with our mother. The *ren* channel represents physical contact with mother. Mothers usually hold their babies with the baby's belly touching a part of mother's body (a mother may carry a child on her back, but very rarely does she have the child's back facing her body). The mouth and eyes, further areas of contact/comfort, are also part of the *ren*. Issues of bonding, such as did I get enough, or was I too protected, will result in the person not knowing how to be satisfied and thus attempt to create more *yin*, leading to too much *yin*, often dirty *yin* in the form of dampness or phlegm: it is common to see asthma in children who were not well bonded. Thus the *ren* can be seen as my ability to know satiation, to feel I have the resources and use them rather than having a need to always accumulate, the need to protect or to be protected. The *ren* affects our intimate relationships, fostering intimacy and commitment. An unsatiated *ren* can lead to

being overly dependent or an inability to commit. The physical symptoms of the *ren* are very similar to those associated with the *chong*: the *chong* involves more a sense of self, while the *ren* involves more love of self (or more commonly in pathologies, lack of self-love).

The *du* represents construction, the one who oversees, who rules. The first point on the channel tells us a lot about its role, *Du 1 chang qiang* is the long endurance: we need endurance to climb up the ladder of life (the ladder can be seen as the spine). The *du* is about how I initiate movement into the long road of life. It is about moving away from mother, it is about becoming upright, becoming independent and *yang*. We see this especially in *Du 4* and *Du 14* which are where movement is initiated when a baby attempts to become upright. First *Du 14* is activated, allowing the neck to extend and for one to see forward into the horizon. Then *Du 4* is activated, allowing one to extend oneself out of a curled position and to actually reach out to the horizon (this will necessitate the use of the legs, of course). The *du* channel represents my ability to break away from *yin*/mother/bond and to explore (rule over) my life. (To become *yang* means to become clear, which requires separation of the pure and the turbid, a concept associated with the opening point of the *du*, *SI 3*). Physical pathologies of the *du* involve the ability to maintain the upright (*yang*, exploration) without pain. Psychologically, the *du* is involved with issues of exploration: am I always looking to take a risk, am I afraid of risks, am I constantly on the defensive, or on the offensive?

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The *wei* vessels represent how we hold together (*wei* - to link or support) the *yin* and *yang*, while the *qiao* vessels represent how we merge *yin* and *yang*.

The *wei* vessels are the vessels of aging. They are the vessels of the cycles of 7 and 8. They represent how we move along in life and transform either *yin* or *yang* as time passes: they maintain the unity and integrity of *yin* or *yang* with time. They are about making transitions. One could say that because space is more *yin* and time is more *yang*, *yin wei* is more related to transitions as related to space and substance,



while *yang wei* is more related to time.

The *yin wei* is about my relationship to the past and the future, about the meaning that I give life, about my sense of purpose. It is about looking at who I am now as related to my past; it is about validating my existence, and about whether I feel I am in the right place, time, or even in the right body. Given these issues, we can see that addictions might fall within the domain of the *yin wei* channel, as an addiction is an attempt to escape from who I am in the here and now, and to allow another 'entity' to take over my life. The *yin wei* starts at Ki 9 (*zhu bin* - the guest house), representing how I play guest to myself (or perhaps to another entity). It then proceeds through the other *yin* channels to end in Ren 23, thus linking the *yin*. Ki 9 represents my ability to take on an identity (hopefully one that is truly mine). It then moves up to meet spleen points, representing my ability to digest the world and give boundaries to my identity. In this process of taking in the world and in creating the boundaries to my identity, I may create some knots (obstacles), as Sp 14 (the abdominal knot - *fu jie*) tells us. Once we have allowed ourselves to take on an identity, have managed to go through the knots of being this identity defined in the world, we arrive at Liv 14 (*qi men* - gate of cycles, or gate of periodicity). Now the challenge is how I move through time (with the spleen representing how I move my identity through space). And finally we come back to the *ren*, to the self, which brings us to the question of 'what does it mean to be me'? We do this through Ren 22 (*tian tu* - the celestial chimney) and Ren 23 (*lian quan* - spring of integrity, usually translated as angular spring), representing my ability to overflow (things that pass through a chimney overflow past it, as do things that pass through a spring) and to express with integrity what I have taken on as I respond to the cycles of time.

*Yang wei* is about linking, supporting, the *yang*. It is more about time than space or substance. In linking *yang* its domain is regarding possibilities, in becoming more rarified, and hence its importance in terminal disease. It links the *yang* meridians, starting at Bl 63 (*jin men* - metal gate), a point that represents the exteriorisation (metal) of my identity. Moving on to GB 35 (*yang jiao* - *yang* intersection), and LI 14, representing *yang ming* (this according to Li Shi Zhen only). Then again through the *yang* channels, SI 10, TH 15, GB 21, up the GB, and ending at the *du* (Du 15) and the brain. (I personally have a lesser understanding of this vessel. However, I have experienced it to effect great transformation in end-stage cancer and HIV clients.)

The *qiao* vessels are about taking on roles: how I merge *yin* and *yang*, bridging in order to stand up to myself or to the world. They are similar to the *wei* vessels, but the *qiao* vessels are more about 'short term' personality; they are about judgement and morality. The *qiao* vessels are not so much about transformation but about one's ability to accept the roles one is taking on.

The *yin qiao* channel can be called the meditation channel, it is about how I stand up to myself. It is about taking on roles with clarity, with the understanding of the vastness of the potential of life. It starts at Ki 6 (*zhao hai* - illuminating sea)

which represents both understanding (shining/illuminating) and vastness (the image of an ocean is primarily of vastness). Once we understand that life is vast and contains all potentials we can come to trust (life and ourselves). This is represented by Ki 8 (*jiao xin* - mutual confidence or intersection of trust). Now the channel goes up through the genitals and the diaphragm/chest, the two main potential obstacles in life, and up to St 9 (*ren yin* - welcome human), and ends at Bl 1 (*jing ming*, bright vision, also called *ming men*, life gate, in the *Ling Shu*). Thus, in order to take on the roles that my human existence offers me, I need to shed light on my life (shining ocean).

### Addiction issues are ways by which we escape the here-and-now and thus we avoid utilising our *yin wei*

Based on illumination and understanding I can go on and build trust (Ki 8). With this as my base I can transcend the obstacle of closed genitals and heart, and arrive to welcome the human being that I am (St 9). I can now express to the world who I really am: I have bright vision. My eyes both take in the world and express to the world who I am. In going through the process of the *yin qiao*, I realise that the greatest gift I have to offer the world is my true self. The pathologies of the *yin qiao* are where one judges oneself (often as unworthy) and is angry at oneself, blaming oneself, turning inwards rather than allowing oneself to interact with the world (thus the physical symptom of sleeping all the time - not interacting).

The *yang qiao* vessel is about standing up to the world: how I extend myself to the world, as its first point states, UB 62 (*shen mai* - extending vessel). The *yang qiao* then goes through all the *yang* channels (that is *tai yang*, *shao yang*, and *yang ming*), representing how we interact with the world, taking experiences, and ends with stomach points that are on the face, representing the internalisation of our interaction (stomach), and how we express it back out to the world (eyes). Issues of over-emphasising the world, and being angry at the world are *yang qiao* issues.

Thus life is about utilising our *ren* (resources) and *du* (construction) by the use of the *qiao* (roles, judgement) and *wei* (linking, making transitions) vessels, in accordance with our *chong* (blueprint).

As we go through these inherent processes of life, of bond-

ing, breaking away to explore, interacting, transforming, creating our roles in the world, etc., we are bound to encounter issues that we are unable, or are unwilling, to deal with or digest at that time. We put those 'under the belt' to be dealt with later. The receptacle for these accumulations is the *dai* channel. It represents all the phlegmy, viscous stuff of our life issues, and thus its symptoms are dampness. (It is because of this association with dampness, stuff unwanted, unabsorbed that Li Shi Zhen added Liv 13, the spleen *mu*, to the trajectory of the *dai*, and as a result GB 26 has been moved further front to accommodate this change.)

### In choosing to work with the 8 extras, we should be aware of their 'extraordinary' character and respect their uniqueness

In choosing to use the 8 extras clinically one must remember that using these vessels is tapping into the *jing*, the essence of one's humanity, the destiny pattern of our lives. This needs to be done with great caution and reverence. We need to remember that what we are tapping into is something that we may not even have the right to tamper with. Not every practitioner is comfortable with the idea of changing (or attempting to change) another's destiny. When I choose to use these channels I always consult with the client. I tell them the story of the channel, its philosophical statements and implications and why I think their life's issue seems to be within that channel's domain. It is only if the client finds resonance with this idea of where their life is not fully expressive, that I proceed, otherwise it is a matter of me passing judgement and manipulating the client (exercising my own pathologies within the realm of my *qiao* vessels).

The purpose of the treatment is simply to remind the client (body/mind/spirit) of the neglected path of life as represented by the channel, not to manipulate the path, but simply to wake it up, to tap into the issues, and to let the *jing* make its own decisions. Thus getting the *qi*, or strong manipulation is not advisable (Kiiko Matsumoto, in Extraordinary Vessels, also indicates that strong stimulation is not recommended in

classical Chinese texts). It is important to get the client's attention to the process. I talk to the client, explaining to them each point name, and its role within the pathway. One can also draw the attention of the client by palpating, which further serves to locate the exact point where energy is most ripe.

In choosing to work with the 8 extras, we should be aware of their 'extraordinary' character and respect their uniqueness. In other words, not all issues translate to 8 extra issues, even if they may sound like they fit. The determining factors in using 8 extra strategies would be that the issue on hand is part of the person's history, that it appears to be part of their karma, and that it relates to their deep seated understanding of themselves and how they see themselves in the world.

I determine the channel I am about to embark the journey on by assessing where the person's issues might be on the 'grand scale'. Is the person rejecting him/herself, unable to accept him/herself, hate the self; these are *chong* issues. Is the person overly bonded, always seeking to bond with someone or something, always searching for a mother figure, unable to move forward; this is the *ren*. Is the person moving forward/outward in life too enthusiastically, too fast, or perhaps afraid to move; this is the *du*. Is the person able to make major transformations in life, do they feel like they are in the right place, time or body, are they in transition due to 'terminal illness'; these are the *yin* and *yang wei* (I tend to see *yin wei* and *yin qiao* more than their *yang* counterparts, an obvious case of clinician's issues affecting how s/he is able to see client issues). Addiction issues are ways by which we escape the here-and-now and thus we avoid utilising our *yin wei*. Judgement issues or issues involving the ability to take on a role in life, or trust oneself in life are in the domain of the *qiao* vessels. Leaving too many things unprocessed is related to the *dai* (though once the *dai* is opened it is likely that another channel issue will become prominent). It is quite conceivable that more than one channel is involved, and one needs to work with whatever issues find resonance at the time of encounter.

It is often easiest to start with the *chong* and the *dai*, since most people do have an accumulation of experiences which have not been fully dealt with (*dai*) and often are uncomfortable with who they are.

Because we are talking about very deep issues, needling the opening points is not enough: most practitioners' intention and concentration are not strong enough to affect the 8 extras this way. Needling the coupled point is not necessary in this style (coupled points became popular in the 17th century with the publication of the *Da Chang Zhen Zhiu*). I needle the opening point (left on the *yin* channels, right on the *yang*, or whatever system resonates for you), and then carry on with the first point on the channel, moving up along the channel, needling the points along the trajectory as I explain to the client what they represent. Since the channels go upwards, I needle from the foot up to the head. I remove the needles in reverse order, but the opening point is taken out last. Each needle points toward the next point to be needled, creating a continuity. (This is not always followed, as by the *Da Chang* tradition the *chong* points are needled toward the *ren*.)

I often use the *chong* and *dai* together, since in allowing



ourselves self-acceptance we tend to come across many issues we have put aside. Starting with Sp 4 I then palpate and needle St 30 toward Ki 11, palpating up the kidney channel, releasing any nodulated points along the trajectory, needling Ki 16 (*huang shu*) toward the centre, and Ki 21 (the dark gate, the entrance to the ribs, the *yin*). Ren 15 can be added at this junction as it serves as an outlet (a *luo*/passage point). I then continue up the trajectory and needle Ki 27 (*shu fu* - again needled toward the centre). At this point I will bring the client's attention to their mouth and eyes where the channel moves, planting the idea of expression and exchange as inherent in one's blueprint (eyes and mouth take in the world and express us to the world). I often needle P 6 also, not as the coupled point to Sp 4, but simply as a point that opens the chest, since as we come in contact with ourselves we are bound to have issues that tighten our chest. The needles are taken out in the reverse order, that is P 6, Ki 27, Ki 21, Ki 16, St 30, Sp 4. These treatments tend to be very relaxing and very deep, and the client may have non-verbal images come up during the treatment (we do not use words during those early times when our *chong* is being formulated). I encourage clients to explore those images over the next day or so. (The choice of points on the *chong* reflects not only transitions from one burner space to the next, but also points that are transformative [*Shu* points] in nature: St 30 - *qi chong*, Ki 16 - the *shu* of the hidden organ, and Ki 27 - the *shu* of the bowels. This treatment is geared towards bringing the person in contact with their blueprint with a strong suggestion for transformation.)

The *dai* is used to release old issues that have not been resolved. Starting with GB 41 (Jeffrey Yuen needles this point under the tendon, towards GB 42), then GB 26, and palpating down GB 27, 28 all the way to St 30, feeling for accumulation or tenderness.

The rest of the channels follow the same idea: needling the opening point, and then the channel proper, palpating the points both to activate them and to determine whether to needle them or not. In using the *yin qiao* trajectory, I tend to palpate the area between Ki 8 and St 9, and bring the client's awareness to the genital and chest areas. When needling Bl 1 I tend to use a slightly thicker needle (a 0.20mm guage rather than 0.18mm guage) because I am aiming at the sensation of opening the eyes or slight tearing in order to achieve bright vision, and also because using a 0.18mm needle it is easier to create a bruise. On the *yin wei*, I tend to palpate the spleen points on the abdomen, and needle them only if there are boundary issues, digestive issues, or a knot/nodule that does not dissolve with massage. I needle Liv 14 superficially outwards (rather than upwards toward Ren 22, the next point) as this is the manner I am comfortable in and it reinforces the idea of smoothing/spreading of cycles.

The needles are retained for 45 minutes, based on the idea that we are tapping into the *jing* which requires a slower process. I stay with the client for a few minutes to see if any issues come up for them, and then allow them time to be alone within their own process. After the needles are out I allow time for those who need to express or communicate. I encour-

age clients to get together with a trusted friend over the next few days. I do not repeat these style treatments for a few weeks so as to allow the client time to assimilate the treatment and any possible implications.

Inevitably these treatments prove to be transformative on a deep level, with clients reporting new imagery and understanding. The changes can be on a physical level, like the client who, as she turned 50, developed a frozen shoulder that did not respond to any treatment except the *yin wei* treatment, or the judgmental man who lost his ankle pain and got awareness of his judgements during a *yin qiao* treatment. More commonly these treatments have a more psycho-spiritual effect, as in the case of a man suffering from panic attacks who after a *yin wei* treatment cried because he realised that as a child he always felt he was punished unjustly (prior to that he had seen his childhood as 'ideal'). His panic attacks diminished and subsided completely after a bladder/kidney divergent meridian treatment.

## Note:

Avi Magidoff is a firm believer in making sense of the meridians in whatever way we can, so that the meridians stop being mechanical entities and begin to resonate with us. His own personal understanding of the 8 extras has been heavily influenced by his teacher, Daoist priest Jeffrey Yuen in New York. However, although rooted in classical understanding, his influences are also Buddhist by nature, influences that cannot possibly be traced back to the Han dynasty. This is an example of how we each develop an understanding that is unique to, and follows, our own life paths.

## Bibliography

1. The 7 and 8 year cycles are discussed in *Su Wen 1* which can be found in a number of English sources: *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*, MaoShing Ni, Shambhala, 1995. *The Way of Heaven*, Claude Larre, Monkey Press, 1994.
2. The trajectories and disorders of the *qi jing ba mai* are originally sited in *Nan Jing 27-29*, translated into English by Paul Unschuld, University of California Press, 1986.
3. The *Su Wen* and *Ling Shu* place little emphasis on these channels, and do not describe them systematically. Primarily the descriptions are in *Su Wen 60* (for the *ren, du, and chong*), *Ling Shu 17* (for *yin qiao*). See *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*, MaoShing Ni, Shambhala, 1995, and *Ling Shu* or *The Spiritual Pivot*, Wu Jing-Nuan, University of Hawaii Press, 1993.
4. A discussion and comparison of trajectories in the different sources can be found in *Extraordinary Vessels*, Kiiko Matsumoto and Stephen Birch, Paradigm Publications, 1986.
5. The best modern source for a discussion on the *qi jing ba mai* can be found in *The Eight Extraordinary Meridians*, Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee, Monkey Press, 1997.