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 *huo* and the *po* also: it is the coming together of the physical *po* and the ancestral/spiritual *huo* that creates the animation of life. Without the *po*, we cannot experience physicality, while without the *huo* we cannot achieve animation and individualization. It would appear that by the time we die most of us would vote for an enriched *huo* 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 *yang 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 yin qi or jing.
Qi jing ba mai can be translated to mean 'extraordinary' 'conducts' or 'channels'. Qi means strange or wondrous
like 'wound' coming out of one's mouth. Jing means internal
or regulator of a territory. Eight is a number which represents
the principal organization 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 primordial, inner-
most organization of life. They are called upon under extraor-
dinary 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
of life. The characters chong is of regular movement of
a person lifting something heavy, thus the notion of dash-
ing, 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 respira-
tional 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 she 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 rep-
resents 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
she has the child's back facing her body). The mouth
and eyes, further areas of contact, comfort, and 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 satis-
fied and thus attempt to create more yin, leading to too
much yang, 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 satura-
tion, to feel I have the resources and use them rather than hav-
ing a need to always accumulate, the need to protect or to be
protected. The ren affects our intimate relationships, fostering
intimacy and commitment. An unsatisfied ren can lead to
being overly dependent or an inability to commit. The physi-
cal 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 chong 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 moth-
er, 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 acti-
vated, 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/motherhood and to explore
(rule over) my life. (To become yang means to become clear,
which requires separation of the pure and the turbid, a con-
cept associated with the opening point of the du, SI 3). Physi-
cal 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 weijing vessels represent how we hold together (net) to
link or support the yin and yang, while the xiao vessels rep-
resent how we emerge yin and yang.
The weijing vessels are the vessels of aging. They are the ves-
sels 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 weijing
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 lín - 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 - fēi jiāo) 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 (gu 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 (tiān tu - the celestial chimney) and Ren 23 (yuán quán - 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 33 (yáng jīn - yang junction), and LI 14, representing yang ming (this according to Li Shi Zhen only). Then again through the yang channels, SI 10, TI 15, GB 23, 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 medication 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 (zhào bì - 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 (jiào xīn - mutual confidence or intersection of trust). Now the channel goes up through the genitals and the diaphragm/heart, the two main potential obstacles in life, and up to St 9 (tèn yīn - welcome human), and ends at Bl 1 (jīng ming, bright vision, also called ming men, life gate, in the 1st 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 symptoms 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 (shèn mài - extending vessel). The yang qiao then goes through all the yang channels (that is t'ai 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 zhong (blueprint).

As we go through these inherent processes of life, of bond-
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 (Kiko 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 weet (I tend to see yin weet and yin qiao more than their yang counterparts, an obvious case of clinician’s issues affecting how she 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 weet. 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 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 Zhu). 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 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, palpatiting the kidney channel, releasing any nodulated points along the trajectory, needling Ki 16 (founding shi) 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 faoj passage point). I then continue up the trajectory and needle Ki 27 (faou fa - 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 lighten 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 point to the next, but also points that are transformative [Shu points] in nature: St 30 - qi chong, Ki 16 - the sha of the hidden organ, and Ki 27 - the sha of the bowls. This treatment is geared towards bringing the person in contact with their blueprint with a strong suggestion for transformation.)

The dag is used to release old issues that have not been resolved. Starting with GB 41, Jeffrey Yuen needles this point under the tendons (toward GB 42), then GB 26, and palpatiting 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, palpatiting 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 (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 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 Li 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 we 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 we 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.

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 extra points has been heavily influenced by his teacher, David Grossman.

Note:

The 7 and 8 year cycles are discussed in Sun Wen 1 which can be found in a number of English sources: The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, Mushan Gw, Nanak, 1993. The Way of Heaven, Claude Laree, Monkey Press, 1994.

The trajectories and disorders of the qi jing lai mai are described in Nan Jing 27:29, translated into English by Paul Uench, University of California Press, 1966.

The Sua Wen and Ling Shu place a little emphasis on these channels, and do not describe them systematically. Primarily the descriptions are in Su Wen 60 (for the ren, fa, and chong). Ling Shu 17 (for the yin we, sha, sha, and yin ren). The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, Mushan Gw, Nanak, 1993, and Ling Shu or The Spiritual Pivot, Wu Jing-Nan, University of Hawaii Press, 1993.

A discussion and comparison of trajectories in the different sources can be found in Extraordinary Vessels, Kiko Matsunoto and Stephen Burch, Paradigm Publications, 1986.

The best modern source for a discussion of the qi jing lai mai can be found in The Eight Extraordinary Meridians, Claude Laree and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée, Monkey Press, 1997.