

THE EIGHT EXTRAORDINARY MERIDIANS

NANJING 27

The mai (vital circulations, 脈) include the eight mai of the extraordinary meridians (*qi jing ba mai* 奇經八脈), eight mai which are not controlled by the 12 meridians (*jing* 脈). What can one say of that ?

Well, it is like this :

there is the yang wei 陽維

there is the yin wei 陰維

there is the yang qiao 陽蹻

there is the yin qiao 陰蹻

there is the chong (mai) 衝

there is the du (mai) 督

there is the ren (mai) 任

there is the dai (mai) 帶

These eight mai are not controlled by the (12) meridians; it is because of this that they are called : the eight mai which are the extraordinary meridians (*qi jing ba mai* 奇經八脈).

[.....]

The Sages (*sheng ren* 聖人) scheme and lay out canals and ditches (*gou qu* 溝渠) for an easy circulation (*tong* 通) of the waterways (*shui dao* 水道); this is to guard against unexpected circumstances. When rain descends from heaven, canals and ditches fill up to overflowing (*yi man* 溢滿). But if the rains are torrential to the point of creating rambling (overflow) (*wang xing* 妄行), then at that moment the Sage man can no longer turn to his (ordinary) scheme; the luomai (絡脈) are full up and overflow. This is why (the ordinary system of) the meridians cannot controlled (the extraordinary meridians).

NANJING 28

DUMAI (督脈) arises from the transfert (hole) (*shu* 俞) at the lower pole (*xia ji* 下極); it doubles the spinal column on the inside; it rises up to Fengfu (Du 16) and enters the brain on which it depends (*shu* 屬).

RENMAI (任脈) arises below the central pole (Zhongji 中極, Ren 3); it rises to the border of the (pubic) hair; it passes along the abdomen on the inside; it rises to Guanyuan (Ren 4); it reaches the throat.

CHONGMAI (衝脈) arises at Qichong (氣衝, St. 30); it doubles the pathways of the meridian of the Yangming of the foot; it surrounds the navel and rises; it reaches the middle of the chest and diffuses there.

DAIMAI (帶脈) arises from the last ribs; it turns once around the body.

YANG QIAOMAI (陽蹻脈) arises from the middle of the heel (*gen zhong* 跟中); it passes over the external (lateral) malleolus and enters Fengchi (G.B.20).

YIN QIAOMAI (陰蹻脈) also arises from the middle of the heel; it passes over the internal malleolus and rises; it reaches the pharynx; it crosses (*jiao* 交) then joins the Chongmai.

YANGWEI (陽維) and YINWEI (陰維) : they fasten and hold the body together (*wei luo* 維絡), in situations of overflowing or of accumulation which prevent the circular movement by which irrigation is poured out to all the meridians. Thus the Yangwei arises at the meeting (*hui* 會) of all the yang and the Yinwei arises at the crossing (*jiao* 交) of all the yin.

NANJING 29 - Translation P. Unschuld

What is it like when the single conduits have an illness ?

It is like this. The yang tie is tied to the yang (conduits); the yin tie is tied to the yin (conduits). When the yin and yang (tie vessels = Weimai)- cannot maintain their respective ties, one feels uncomfortable and loses one's mind. One is weak and cannot support one's (stature).

When the yang tie (=Yangwei) has an illness, one suffers from (fits of) cold and heat.

When the yin tie (=Yinwei) has an illness, one suffers from heartache.

When the yin walker (-vessel = Yinqiao) has an illness, the yang (walker-vessel =Yangqiao) is relaxed while the yin (walker-vessel) is tense.

When the yang walker (-vessel) has an illness, the yin (walker-vessel) is relaxed while the yang (walker-vessel) is tense.

When the through-way (vessel = Chongmai) has an illness, the influences move contrary to their proper course and tensions occur inside (the abdomen).

When the supervisor (vessel = Dumai) has an illness, one's back is stiff and (it is bent) backward.

When the controller (vessel = Renmai) has an illness, one suffers from internal knots. Males will develop the seven accumulation ills; females will develop concentration ills.

When the belt (vessel = Daimai) has an illness the abdomen will be full, and the loins will be bloated as if one were sitting in water.

SUWEN 1

(In a woman) At 2 times 7 years, fertility arrives, Renmai functions fully while the powerful Chongmai rises in power : The menses flow downwards in their time and she has children.

[.....]

At 7 times 7 years, the Renmai is empty, the powerful Chongmai declines progressively, fertility dries up : nothing further passes through the way of Earth, the body withers and she no longer has children.

SUWEN 39 - Transl. P. Unsculd

When cold qi settles in the thoroughfare vessel (*chong mai* 衝脈), (the thoroughfare vessel emerges from the Pass Head (Guanyuan, Ren 4), and rises straight up along the abdomen) when cold qi settles [in it], then this vessel is no [longer] passable (*tong* 通). When this vessel is no [longer] passable, then the qi moves accordingly. Hence, a panting movement responds to the [pressure exerted by the] hand.

SUWEN 44

Chongmai is the sea of the meridians (*jing mai* 經脈); it commands the humidification and irrigation, through impregnation, of the small and large valleys (*xi gu* 溪谷); it makes its junction (*he* 合) with the Yangming at the ancestral muscle (basic sinew, *zong jin* 宗筋).

Yin and yang meet together at the ancestral muscle; they meet at Qijie (ST 30) and the Yangming is the leader. They all depend (*shu* 屬) on the Daimai (帶脈) and connect (*luo* 絡) with the Dumai (督脈). So, when the Yangming is empty, the ancestral muscle is loose (*zong* 縱), the Daimai no longer leads (the qi, *yin* 引) and for this reason the feet (lower limbs) are flaccid (wilting, *wei* 痿) and can no longer function.

SUWEN 60

Renmai (任脈) arises below the central pole (*Zhongji* 中極, Ren 3); it rises to the border of the (pubic) hair; it passes along the abdomen on the inside; it rises to Guanyuan (Ren 4); it reaches the throat (*yan hou* 咽喉), rises to the chin, passes through the face and enters the eyes.

Chongmai arises from Qijie (氣街, St.30); doubling the meridian of Shaoyin, it surrounds the navel and rises; it reaches the middle of the chest and diffuses there.

When Renmai generates diseases, in a man there is inner knots (*nei jie* 內結) and the 7 kinds of shan (疝); in a woman there is vaginal discharge (*dai xia* 帶下) and conglomeration with gathering (*jia ju* 瘕聚).

When Chongmai generates diseases, the qi goes counterflow (rebellious qi, *ni qi* 逆氣) and abdominal urgency (*li ji* 裡急).

When Dumai generates diseases, the spine is stiff and is arched in reverse (opisthotonos, *fan zhe* 反折)

[.....]

Dumai arises in the lower abdomen and descends directly in the middle of the bone (of the symphysis pubis).

In women, it enters to connect with the extremity of the urinary meatus. Its connecting pathway (*luo* 絡) passes through the genitals and makes a junction in between (the two lower orifices) at the perineum. It follows the curve of the perineum behind and send a divergent pathway (*bie* 別) to follow the curve of the buttocks; it reaches the Shaoyin as well as the central connecting

pathway (*luo* 絡) of the great yang (i.e. the external branch of the Taiyang, Bladder meridian in the back). It makes a junction with the Shaoyin and rises on the upper-internal face of the thigh (the yin aspect of the thigh); it passes through the spinal column and depends (*shu* 屬) on the kidneys. It arises with Taiyang at the internal corner of the eye; it rises to the forehead and makes a crossing (*jiao* 交) above at the vertex; it enters and connects (*luo* 絡) with the brain; returning, it leaves (the depths of the brain), send a divergent pathway to (*bie* 別) and descends the nape of the neck; it passes through the internal part of the scapula, flanks the spinal column and reaches the middle of the loins; it enters (deep) and runs along the vertebral column and connects (*luo* 絡) with the kidneys.

In men, it runs along the penis and descends to the perineum; then it is the same as women.

The pathway that rises directly from the lower abdomen runs through the middle of the navel, rises to go through the heart and enters the throat, rises to the chin, encircles the lips, rises to connect under the two eyes, right in the middle.

Transl. P. Unschuld :

When it generates a disease, there is pain from the lower abdomen rushing upwards to the heart (*shang chong xin* 上衝心). [Patients] cannot [relieve nature] in front and behind. This causes the surging elevation illness (*chong shan* 衝疝).

In females [this disease] prevents them from becoming pregnant. [Also, it leads to] protuberance illness (*long* 癰), piles, [involuntary] loss of urine, and dry throat.

When the supervisor vessel generates a disease, treat the supervisor vessel. Treat it above the [pubic] bone. In severe cases [treat] at the camp (*ying* 營) below the navel.

When [the patient experiences] rising qi with sounds, treat in the center of the throat.
{This is in the midst of the broken basins.}

When the [patient] suffers from [qi] rushing upwards to the throat (*shang chong yan* 上衝喉), treat at the advance.{As for 'advance,' this is the rise [of the vessels] on both sides of the chin.}.

LINGSHU 10

The divergent (pathways, *bie* 別 = *luo*) of the Renmai is called Weiyi (尾翳), it descends to Jiuwei (Ren 15, 鳩尾) and spreads in the abdomen.

In case of fulness, the skin of the abdomen is painful (*fu pi tong* 腹皮痛). In case of emptiness, it itches (*yang sao* 癢搔).

The divergent (pathways, *bie* 別 = *luo*) of the Dumai is called Changqiang (DU1,). It runs both sides of the spine and ascends to the nape of the neck; above it spreads in the head; below it runs on the left and right scapula; a divergent (pathways, *bie* 別) goes to the Taiyang, penetrates and threads through the spine.

In case of fulness, the spine is stiff (*ji jiang* 脊強). In case of emptiness, the head is heavy (*tou zhong* 頭重), the high shakes (*gao yao* 高搖).

LINGSHU 17

Huang di : From where does Qiaomai arise, and where does it stop ? How is its qi concerned with making lustrous (*rong* 榮) and watered (*shui* 水) ?

Qi Bo ; Qiao is a divergent (pathways, *bie* 別) of the Shaoyin, arising behind Rangu (Kid 2). It ascends over the inner malleolus it ascends straight following the internal part of the thigh, penetrating the genitals (*yin* 陰). It ascends following the chest inwardly and enters Quepen (St. 12). It ascends and exits in front of Renying (St.9). It enters the cheekbone and pays obedience (*shu* 屬) to the inner canthus, where it makes a junction (*he* 合) with Taiyang and Yangqiao, and continues to rise. When the qi (of the 2 Qiao and Taiyang) are all together in mutual exchanges, then they moisten (*ru* 濡) the eyes; if the qi does not make it lustrous, then the eye does not close (*he* 合).

[.....]

Qiaomai, they are yin and yang. But which circulation (*mai* 脈) enters in the calculation (of the total length for all the *mai* in the body, *shu* 數) ?

For a man, the calculation (numbers, natural law, *shu* 數) takes the yang and for a woman, it takes the yin. The one which is taken is the meridian (the norm, the ruler, *jing* 經) and the one which is not taken is the luo (絡).

LINGSHU 21

The Taiyang of the foot passes (*tong* 通) through the neck and penetrates into the brain. It directly goes to be obedient (*shu* 屬) to the root of the eyes (*yan gen* 目本), which is called the network of the eye (*yan xi* 眼系).

If the head and eye have sharp pains one needles the middles of the nape of the neck between the two muscles. It penetrates to the brain and separates into Yinqiao (陰蹻) and Yangqiao (陽蹻).

Yin and Yang intertwine (*xiang jiao* 相交), the yang penetrates the yin and the yin comes out of the yang. There is a meeting at the internal corner of the eye. When the yang qi prospers (*sheng* 盛), then one opens the eyes. When the yin qi prospers, then one closes the eye.

LINGSHU 33

Chongmai is the sea of the 12 meridians. Its transfert points (*shu* 輸) are above at Dazhu (BL 11) and below it appears at the upper and lower face of the great void (= ST 37 and ST 39)

[.....]

Excess of the sea of blood : one has constantly the sensation of a large body, one is ill at ease (anxious and unhappy) without knowing where the illness is.

Insufficiency of sea of blood : one has constantly the sensation of a small body, one is cramped without knowing where the illness is.

LINGSHU 38

The Chongmai is the sea of the Five zang and Six fu.

Its rising (part) appears at the oropharynx, filters to all the yang, irrigates all the essences.

Its descending (part) pours out into the great connecting network (*luo* 絡) of the Shaoyin, arises under the kidneys, appears at Qijie (ST 30), runs along the internal face of the yin aspect of the thigh; obliquely enters the middle of the back of the knee, hides itself and circulates on the internal face of the tibia; together with the Shaoyin meridian, it descends and enters behind the internal malleolus; it enters under the foot.

Its divergent pathway (*bie* 別), together with the Shaoyin, filters into the three yin, obliquely enters the malleolus, hides itself and circulates, leaves and depends (*shu* 屬) on the top of the foot, penetrates the big toe; it filters into the connecting circulations (*luo* 絡) and warms the flesh of the foot and leg.

LINGSHU 52

The qi of the chest has a road (street, *jie* 街); the qi of the abdomen has a road; the qi of the head has a road; and the qi of the leg has a road. Hence, when the qi is in the head, it stops in the brain. When the qi is in the chest, it stops in the breasts and the shu back point (*bei shu* 背俞). When the qi is in the abdomen, it stops at the shu back (*bei shu* 背俞) points and at the Chongmai, the circulation moving (beating, *dong mai* 動脈) both sides of the navel. When the qi is in the leg, it stops at the Qi Street (St.30, Qijie 氣街), at Chengshan (Bl.57) and above and below the malleolus.

LINGSHU 62

Chongmai is the sea of the 12 meridians (*jing* 經).

With the great connecting circulation (*luo* 絡) of the Shaoyin, it arises under the kidneys and appears at Qijie (ST 30). It runs along the yin aspect of the thigh and, obliquely, it enters the middle of the popliteal crease, it runs along the leg inside together with the Shaoyin meridian: it descends and enters behind the internal malleolus; it enters underneath the foot.

LINGSHU 65

Chongmai and Renmai both arise inside of the vital protection (*bao zhong* 胞中); they rise running up the back on the inside and make the sea of the meridians and connective circulations (*jing luo* 經絡). Their pathway, emerged and external, runs along the abdomen by the right and rise. They meet together at the pharynx; a detachment (*bie* 別) takes a connecting (*luo* 絡) relation with the lips and the mouth.

When blood and qi (*xue qi* 血氣) rise in power, the skin is filled and the flesh warmed. When only the blood rises in power, a drop by drop infiltration of the layers of the skin gives what is necessary to the growth of the hair.

Now women, in their physiology, have an excess of qi and an insufficiency of blood, following the frequent loss of blood; Chongmai and Renmai do not make her mouth and lips flourish (*rong* 榮), and because of this she does not have a beard growing there.

[.....]

Eunuchs (by accident or operation) their ancestral muscle (basic sinew, *zong jin* 宗筋) has gone, their Chongmai has been attacked, the blood has been dispersed without return, the skin is knotted on the inside; there is no flourishing at the lips and mouth, and this is why the beard does not grow.

[.....]

(With natural eunuchs) there is an insufficiency in the nature (Heaven, inborn, *tian* 天); with them Renmai and Chongmai did not prosper (*bu sheng* 不盛), the ancestral muscle is incomplete (*bu cheng* 不成).

LINGSHU 73

If one cannot localize the suffering, (one needles) the two Qiao, below.

If one needles the Yin for a man and the Yang for a woman, one does something forbidden to a practitioner of a high level.

QIJING BAMAI KAO by Li Shizhen

Daimai surges from the point Zhangmen (Liv.13) on the Jueyin of the foot, by the lower ribs. Together with the Shaoyang of the foot, it runs along the point Daimai (GB 26). It makes a complete circuit of the body, like a belt which is tied together. It meets the Shaoyang of the foot again at Wushu (GB 27) and Weidao (GB 28).

Yang Shi says : Daimai takes all the mai (脈) under its command by linking them; it ensures that there is no erratic circulation like a man who ties together a belt which hangs at the front.

[.....]

The Yinqiao (陰蹻) is a mai (脈) which diverges (*bie* 別) from the Shaoyin of the foot. Together with the Shaoyin, it runs along the internal malleolus under the point Zhaohai (Kid 6). It rises 2 cun above the internal malleolus to make Jiaoxin (Kid 8) its reserve (*xi* clef point), then it rises directly, running over yin aspect of the thigh and enters the genitals (*yin* 陰). It rises, running through the chest and penetrates Quepen (ST 12), it rises, appearing in front of Renying (ST 9). It reaches the larynx, with which it makes a crossing exchange (*jiao* 交), and links with Chongmai. It enters the internal side of the malar bone, it rises and depends (*shu* 屬) on the internal corner of the eye, where there is a meeting of Five mai : Taiyang of the hand and foot, Yangming of the foot, Yangqiao and Yinqiao, at Jingming (BL 1).

[.....]

The Yangqiao (陽蹻) is a mai which diverges (*bie* 別) from the Taiyang of the foot. This mai surges from the middle of the heel. It appears under the external (lateral) malleolus, at Shenmai (BL 62) of the Taiyang of the foot. At the level of the back of the malleolus, it turns around the heel to root itself (*ben* 本) at Pucan (BL 61). It rises directly, running over the external face of the thigh, runs over the back of the ribs and rises to the top of the back. It meets the Taiyang of the hand at Naoyu (SI 10). It rises on the external sides of the shoulder and above the scapula and meets the Yangming of the hand at Jianyu (Co 15). It rises to Renying (ST 9), and surrounds the corners of the mouth. It meets with the Yangming of the hand and foot and Renmai at Dicang (ST 4). Together with the Yangming of the foot it rises to Juliao (ST 3). It meets once more with the Renmai at Chengqi (ST 1). It reaches the internal corner of the eye where there is a meeting of Five mai : Taiyang of the hand and foot, Yangming of the foot, Yinqiao and Yangqiao, at Jingming (BL 1). From Jingming (BL 1), it rises and enters the hairline, it descends behind the ear, enters Fengchi (GB 20) and ends.

[.....]

The Yinwei (陰維) surges from where all the yin cross (*zhu yin zhi jiao* 諸陰之交). Its mai is launched from the point Binzhu (Kid 9) on the Shaoyin of the foot which is, for the Yinwei, a reserve (*xi* clef point).[...] The mai rises, running over the yin aspect of the thigh, and in rising, enters the lower abdomen. It meets with the Taiyin, Jueyin, Shaoyin and Yangming of the foot at Fushe (Sp 13). It rises to meet Taiyin at Daheng (SP 15) and Fuai (Sp 16). It runs over the ribs and meets the Jueyin of the foot at Qimen (Liv 14). It rises to the chest and diaphragm and surrounds the pharynx. It meets with Renmai at Tiantu (Renmai 22), and Lianquan (Renmai 23) and rises to reach the front of the top of the head where it ends.

[.....]

The Yangwei (陽維) surges from the meeting of all the yang (*zhu yang zhi hui* 諸陽之會). Its mai is launched from the point Jinmen (BL 63) of the Taiyang of the foot..... It rises to 7 cun above the malleolus where it meets the Shaoyang of the foot at Yangjiao (GB 35) which is its reserve (*xi* clef point). It runs over the knee on the external face and rising by the depression along the femur, reaches the side of the lower abdomen. It meets with Shaoyang of the foot at Juliao (GB 29). It runs over the ribs, rising obliquely over them; it meets the Yangming of the hand and Tai yang of the foot and hand at Binao (Co 14); it passes to the front of the shoulder and meets the Shaoyang of the hand at Naohui (TH 13) and Tianliao (TH 15). It returns and meets the Shaoyang of the foot and hand and the Yangming of the foot at Jianjing (GB 21). It penetrates behind the shoulder and meets the Taiyang of the hand and the Yangqiao at Naoyu (SI 10). It rises and runs along the back of the ear, it meets the Shaoyang of the hand and foot at Fengchi (GB 20); it rises to Naokong (GB 19), Chengling (GB 18), Zhengying (GB 17), Muchuang (GB 16) and Lingqi (GB 15). It descends onto the forehead and it is the meeting of Five mai : Shaoyang of the foot and hand, Yangming of the foot and hand (and Yangwei) at Yangbai (GB 14). It runs along the head and enters the ear. It rises to Benshen (GB 13) and ends.

QIJING BAMAI KAO by Li Shizhen - Transl. C. Chase

People have channel vessels and network vessels throughout their bodies. Those that travel longitudinally are called channels, while those that branch off are called networks. There are 12 channels [consisting of] three yin and three yang of the hand, and the three yin and three yang of the foot. There are 15 networks. Each of the 12 channels has its own branching network, and the spleen also has a great network. In addition, with the two networks of the *ren* and *du* [vessels], there are 15 [networks]. (The *Classic of Difficulties* posits a yin network and a yang network.) Combined, the 27 qi [of the channels and networks] move up and down together as if flowing from a spring, moving like the sun and moon without rest. Thus, the yin vessels manage [the qi] in the five yin viscera while the yang vessels sustain the six yang receptacles. Yin and yang connect with each other in an endless circuit in which there is no discernable break. Upon reaching the end, it just starts again. The overflow of qi [from the channels and networks] enters the extraordinary vessels, providing reciprocal irrigation, interiorly warming the yin viscera and yang receptacles, and exteriorly moistening the interstices.

The eight extraordinary channels are altogether eight vessels that are not controlled by the 12 main channels, nor are they arranged in exterior-interior combinations, and therefore they are called extraordinary. The main channels are like irrigation ditches, and the extraordinary channels are like lakes and marshes. When the vessels of the main channels are swollen and abundant, they overflow into the extraordinary channels. Thus it was that Qin Yue-Ren compared this to when the “rains pour down from heaven, the irrigation ditches overflow, the rain floods rush wildly, flowing into the lakes and marshes.” This is the revelation of the secret meaning not presented in *Divine [Pivot]* and *Basic [Questions]*.

[Discussions of] the eight vessels scattered throughout the masses of [medical] texts are sketchy and incomplete. If physicians are not aware [of such theories of the extraordinary channels], they will remain in the dark as to the cause of disease. If [aspiring] transcendents are not aware [of the more comprehensive theories of the extraordinary channels], it will be difficult for them to tame the furnace and the cauldron. [Although I,] Li Shi-Zhen, am not clever, I have carefully considered the statements of all [the various schools] and compiled them below to allow both transcendents and physicians to trap and snare these useful words.

[.....]

Hua Bo-ren states : « The two vessels of the *ren* and *du* are but two branches with a single source. One travels along the front of the body and another travels along the back of the body. A person's body has the *ren* and *du*, just as heaven and earth have *zi* and *wu* (midday and midnight), which may be perceived as divided or united. Divide them and it is apparent that their yin and yang [aspects] cannot be separated. Unite them [and] it is apparent that they are coalesced without differentiation. The singular is plural, and the plural is singular.

[.....]

The two vessels of the *ren* and *du* [mentioned] in medical texts are where the primal qi is engendered, and the place from which the true breath arises. If cultivators of the elixir lack understanding of this opening, then the true breath is not engendered, and the transformation of the spirit is without foundation.

Yu Yan's annotations to *Token to the Agreement of the Three* states that the circulation of qi and blood within the human body ebbs and flows day and night without ceasing. The medical texts have the two vessels of the *du* and *ren*. « If a person can open these two vessels, the all the hundreds of vessels can be open. »