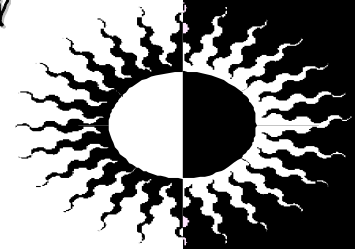


ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, INC.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHIA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.
DIPLO. AC., DIPLO. C.H. (NCCAOM)



The Eight Extraordinary Qi Vessels

by [Yang, Jwing-Ming](#)



Acupuncture.com

Resources For Patients, Practitioners & Students

The eight extraordinary Qi vessels and the twelve primary Qi channels (meridians) comprise the main part of the channel system. Most of the eight vessels branch out from the twelve primary channels and share the function of circulating Qi throughout the body. These vessels form a web of complex interconnections with the channels. At the same time, each has its own functional characteristics and clinical utility independent of the channels. Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the twelve primary organ-related channels and only two of the eight vessels (the Governing and the Conception vessels). The other six vessels are not used very often simply because they are not understood as well as the other channels, and there is still a lot of research being conducted on them. Although they were discovered two thousand years ago, little has been written about them. There is a lot of research on the extraordinary vessels being conducted today, especially in Japan, but the results of one researcher often contradict the results that another has achieved.

On this page we would like to compile and summarize the important points from the limited number of available documents. Since references from original Chinese sources are very scarce, and references from Western textbooks are tentative, esoteric, or in disagreement with one another, I have used my own judgement in selecting ideas and details. Before reviewing these eight vessels, we will first define them and then summarize their functions.

What are the Eight Vessels?

The eight vessels are called "Qi Jing Ba Mai." Qi means odd, strange, or mysterious. Jing means meridian or channels. Ba means eight and Mai means vessels. Qi Jing Ba Mai is then translated as "Odd Meridians and Eight Vessels" or "Extraordinary Meridians (EM)." "Odd" has a meaning of strange in Chinese. It is used simply because these eight vessels are not well understood yet. Many Chinese doctors explain that they are called "Odd" simply because there are four vessels that are not paired. Since these eight vessels also contribute to the maintenance of homeostasis, some times they are called "Homeostatic Meridians." French acupuncturists call them "Miraculous Meridians" because they were able to create therapeutic effects when all other techniques had failed. In addition, because each of these channels exerts a strong effect upon psychic

695 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 240
Denver, Colorado 80246

Telephone: (303) 777-8818
Fax: (303) 777-8505

E-mail: acu-health@usa.net

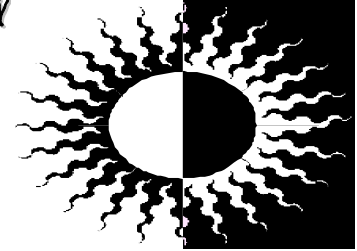
Web Site: www.acu-health.com

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, P.A.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUI NA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.

Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



functioning and individuality, the command points are among the most important psychological points in the body. For this reason, they are occasionally called "The Eight Psychic Channels."

These vessels are:

1. [Governing Vessel](#) (Du Mai)
2. [Conception Vessel](#) (Ren Mai)
3. [Thrusting Vessel](#) (Chong Mai)
4. [Girdle Vessel](#) (Dai Mai)
5. [Yang Heel Vessel](#) (Yangqiao Mai)
6. [Yin Heel Vessel](#) (Yinqiao Mai)
7. [Yang Linking Vessel](#) (Yangwei Mai)
8. [Yin Linking Vessel](#) (Yinwei Mai).

General Functions of the Eight Vessels

1. Serve as Qi Reservoirs:

Because the eight vessels are so different from each other, it is difficult to generalize their characteristics and functions. However, one of the most common characteristics of the eight vessels was specified by Bian Que in his "Nan Jing." He reported that:

The twelve organ-related Qi channels constitute rivers, and the eight extraordinary vessels constitute reservoirs.

These reservoirs, especially the Conception and Governing vessels, absorb excess Qi from the main channels, and then return it when they are deficient. You should understand however, that because of the limited number of traditional documents, as well as the lack of modern, scientific methods of Qi research, it is difficult to determine the precise behavior and characteristics of these eight vessels. They can be understood on a number of different levels, and they perform different functions and contain every kind of Qi such as Ying Qi, Wei Qi, Jing Qi, and even blood.

695 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 240
Denver, Colorado 80246

E-mail: acu-health@usa.net

Telephone: (303) 777-8818

Fax: (303) 777-8505

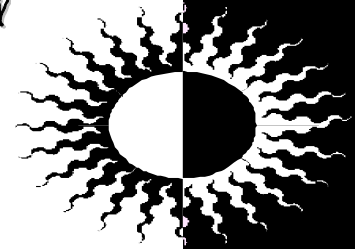
Web Site: www.acu-health.com

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, P.A.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHIA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.

Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



When the twelve primary channels are deficient in Qi, the eight vessels will supply it. This store of Qi can easily be tapped into with acupuncture needles through those cavities connecting the eight vessels to the twelve channels. The connection cavities behave like the gates of a reservoir, which can be used to adjust the strength of the Qi flow in the rivers and the level of Qi in the reservoir. Sometimes, when it is necessary, the reservoir will release Qi by itself. For example, when a person has had a shock, either physical ly or mentally, the Qi in some of the main channels will be deficient. This will cause particular organs to be stressed, and Qi will accumulate rapidly around these organs. When this happens, the reservoir must release Qi to increase the deficient circulation and prevent further damage.

2. Guard Specific Areas Against 'Evil Qi'

The Qi which protects the body from outside intruders is called "Wei Qi" (Guardian Qi). Among the eight vessels, the Thrusting vessel, the Governing vessel, and the Conception vessel play major roles in guarding the abdomen, thorax, and the back.

3. Regulate the Changes of Life Cycles

According to Chapter 1 of "Su Wen," the Thrusting vessel and the Conception vessel also regulate the changes of the life cycles which occur at 7 year intervals for women and 8 year intervals for men.

4. Circulate Jing Qi to the Entire Body, Particularly the Five 'Ancestral Organs'

One of the most important functions of the eight vessels is to deliver Jing Qi (Essence Qi, which has been converted from Original Essence and sexual essence) to the entire body, including the skin and hair. They must also deliver Jing Qi to the five ancestral organs: the brain and spinal cord, the liver and gall bladder, the bone marrow, the uterus, and the blood system.

1. [The Governing Vessel \(Du Mai\)](#)

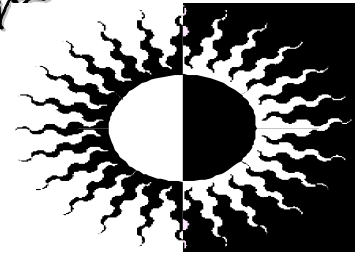
The Governing Vessel is the confluence of all the Yang channels, over which it is said to "govern." Because it controls all the Yang channels, it is called the "Sea of Yang Meridians." This is apparent from its pathway because it flows up the midline of the back, a Yang area, and in the center of all Yang channels (except the stomach channel which flows in the front). The Governing Vessel governs all

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, INC.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUI NA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.

Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



the Yang channels, which means that it can be used to increase the Yang energy of the body.

Since the Governing Vessel is the "Sea of Yang Meridians" and it controls or governs the back, the area richest in Guardian Qi (Wei Qi), it is also responsible for the circulation of the body's Guardian Qi to guard against external evil intruders. The circulation of Guardian Qi starts from Fengfu (Gv-IG), and moves down the Governing Vessel to Huiyin (LI-1). It is said that it takes 21 days for the Guardian Qi to flow from Fengfu to Huiyin, and 9 days from Huiyin to the throat, making it a monthly cycle.

According to Chinese medical science, Guardian Qi is Yang Qi and therefore represents the "Fire" of the body. Its quick and ubiquitous circulation keeps the fire going in the body and controls the loss of body heat. Guardian Qi is also inextricably linked with the fluids that flow outside the channels, in the skin and flesh. Consequently, through the breathing (under control of the lungs), Guardian Qi is responsible for the opening and the closing of the pores, and also controls sweating.

The Governing vessel is also responsible for nourishing the five ancestral organs, which include the brain and spinal cord. This is one of the ways in which the kidneys "control" the brain, as is said in Chinese medicine.

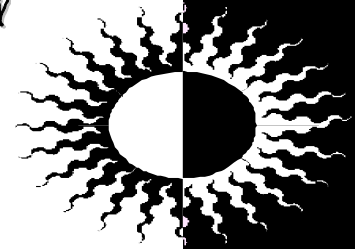
Because of their importance to health, the Governing vessel and the Conception vessel are considered the two most important Qi channels to be trained in Qigong, especially in Nei Dan. Training related to these two vessels includes: 1. How to fill them with Qi so that you have enough to regulate the twelve channels, 2. How to open up stagnant areas in these two vessels so that the Qi flows smoothly and strongly, 3. How to effectively direct the Qi to nourish the brain and raise up the Shen, 4. How to effectively govern the Qi in the twelve channels, and nourish the organs, 5. How to use your raised Shen to lead the Guardian Qi to the skin and strengthen the Guardian Qi shield covering your body.

In Nei Dan Qigong training, when you have filled up the Qi in these two vessels and can effectively circulate the Qi in them, you have achieved the "Small Circulation." In order to do this, you must know how to convert the essence stored in the kidneys into Qi, circulate this Qi in the Governing and Conception vessels, and finally lead this Qi to the head to nourish the brain and Shen (spirit).

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, PC

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHIA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.
Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



[TOP](#)

2. The Conception Vessel (Ren Mai)

Ren in Chinese means "direction, responsibility." Ren Mai, the "Conception Vessel," has a major role in Qi circulation, monitoring and directing all of the Yin channels (plus the stomach channel). The Conception Vessel is connected to the Thrusting and Yin Linking vessels, and is able to increase the Yin energy of the body. This vessel nourishes the uterus (one of the five ancestral organs) and the whole genital system. It is said in the Nei Jing that the Conception and Thrusting vessels contain both blood and essence (Jing), and both flow up to the face and around the mouth. They contain more blood than essence in men, and thus promote the growth of the beard and body hair. Because women lose blood with their menstruation, they contain proportionately less blood and hence, no beard or body hair.

It was described in the Su Wen that both the Conception and Thrusting vessels control the life cycles every 7 years for women and every 8 years for men. It is the changes taking place in these vessels at those intervals that promote the major alterations in our lives.

In addition, the Conception vessel also controls the distribution and "dispersion" of Guardian Qi all over the abdomen and thorax via numerous small Qi branches (Luo). This vessel also plays an important role in the distribution of body fluids in the abdomen.

In Qigong society, this vessel and the Governing vessel are considered the most important among the Qi channels and vessels, and must be trained first. It is believed that there is usually no significant Qi stagnation in the Conception vessel. However, it is important to increase the amount of Qi you are able to store, which also increases your ability to regulate the Yin channels.

[TOP](#)

3. The Thrusting Vessel (Chong Mai)

695 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 240
Denver, Colorado 80246

Telephone: (303) 777-8818
Fax: (303) 777-8505

E-mail: acu-health@usa.net

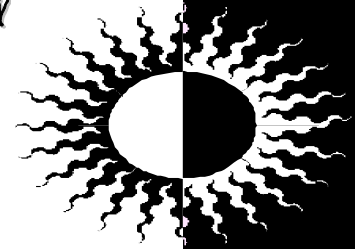
Web Site: www.acu-health.com

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, P.A.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.

Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



One of the major purposes of the Thrusting vessel is to connect, to communicate, and to mutually support the Conception vessel. Because of this mutual Qi support, both can effectively regulate the Qi in the kidney channel. The kidneys are the residence of Original Qi and are considered one of the most vital Yin organs.

The Thrusting vessel is considered one of the most important and decisive vessels in successful Qigong training, especially in Marrow Washing. There are many reason for this. The first reason is that this vessel intersects two cavities on the Conception vessel: Huiyin (LI-1) and Yinjiao (LI-7). Huiyin means "meeting with Yin" and is the cavity where the Yang and Yin Qi are transferred. Yinjiao means "Yin Junction" and is the cavity where the Original Qi (Water Qi, or Yin Qi) interfaces with the Fire Qi created from food and air. The Thrusting Vessel also connects with eleven cavities on the kidney channel. The kidney is considered the residence of Original Essence (Yuan Jing), which is converted into Original Qi (Yuan Qi).

The second reason for the importance of the Thrusting Vessel in Qigong training is that this vessel is connected directly to the spinal cord and reaches up to the brain. The major goal of Marrow Washing Qigong is to lead the Qi into the marrow and then further on to the head, nourishing the brain and spirit (Shen).

And finally, the third reason is found in actual Qigong practice. There are three common training paths: Fire, Wind, and Water. In Fire path Qigong, the emphasis is on the Fire or Yang Qi circulating in the Governing vessel and therefore strengthening the muscles and organs. The Fire path is the main Qi training in Muscle/Tendon Changing (Yi Jin Jing) Qigong. However, the Fire path can also cause the body to become too Yang, and therefore speed up the process of degeneration. In order to adjust the Fire to a proper level, Marrow Washing Qigong is also trained. This uses the Water path, in which Qi separates from the route of the Fire path at the Huiyin cavity (LI-1), enters the spinal cord, and finally reaches up to the head. The Water path teaches how to use Original Qi to cool down the body, and then to use this Qi to nourish the brain and train the spirit. Learning to adjust the Fire and Water Qi circulation in the body is called Kan-Li, which means Water-Fire. You can see from this that the Thrusting vessel plays a very important role in Qigong training.

[TOP](#)

695 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 240
Denver, Colorado 80246

E-mail: acu-health@usa.net

Telephone: (303) 777-8818

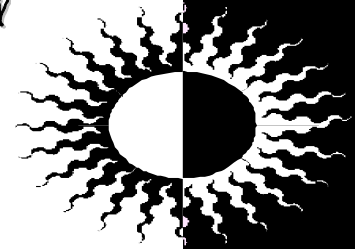
Fax: (303) 777-8505

Web Site: www.acu-health.com

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, INC.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHIA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.
DIPLO. AC., DIPLO. C.H. (NCCAOM)



4. The Girdle Vessel (Dai Mai)

The major purpose of the Girdle vessel is to regulate the Qi of the gall bladder. It is also responsible for the Qi's horizontal balance. If you have lost this balance, you will have lost your center and balance both mentally and physically.

From the point of view of Qigong, the Girdle vessel is also responsible for the strength of the waist area. When Qi is full and circulating smoothly, back pain will be avoided. In addition, because the kidneys are located nearby, this vessel is also responsible for Qi circulation around the kidneys, maintaining the kidneys' health. Most important of all for the Girdle vessel is the fact that the Lower Dan Tian is located in its area. In order to lead Original Qi from the kidneys to the Lower Dan Tian, the waist area must be healthy and relaxed. This means that the Qi flow in the waist area must be smooth. The training of the Girdle vessel has been highly developed, and will be discussed in a later YMAA Book.

[TOP](#)

5. The Yang Heel Vessel (Yangqiao Mai)

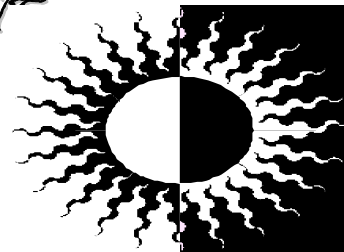
While the preceding four vessels (Governing, Conception, Thrusting, and Girdle) are located in the trunk, the Yang Heel Vessel and the next three are located in the trunk and legs. (In addition, each of these four vessels is paired.) For millions of years, man has been walking on his legs, which perform much more strenuous work than the arms. I believe that it was because of this that, as evolution proceeded, the legs gradually developed these vessels to supply Qi support and regulate the channels. If this is true, it may be that, as time goes on and man uses his legs less and less, in a few million years these vessels will gradually disappear.

You can see from the way that the Yang Heel vessel intersects with other Qi channels that it regulates the Yang channels, such as the urinary bladder, the gall bladder, the small intestine, and the large intestine. The Yang Heel vessel is also connected with the Governing vessel. The Qi filling this vessel is supplied mainly through exercising the legs, which converts the food essence or fat stored

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, PC

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TAI CHI MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.
Dipl. Ac., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)



in the legs. This Qi is then led upward to nourish the Yang channels. It is believed in Qigong that, since this vessel is also connected with your brain, certain leg exercises can be used to cure headaches. Since a headache is caused by excess Qi in the head, exercising the legs will draw this Qi downward to the leg muscles and relieve the pressure in the head.

Most of the training that relates to this vessel is Wai Dan. Wai Dan Qigong is considered Yang, and specializes in training the Yang channels, while Nei Dan Qigong is considered relatively Yin and emphasizes the Yin channels more.

[TOP](#)

6. [The Yin Heel Vessel \(Yinqiao Mai\)](#)

The Yin Heel vessel is connected with two cavities of the kidney channel. Therefore, one of the major sources of Qi for this vessel is the conversion of the kidney essence into Qi. It is believed in Qigong society that the other major Qi source is the essence of the external kidneys (testicles). In Marrow Washing Qigong, one of the training processes is to stimulate the testicles in order to increase the hormone production and increase the conversion of the essence into Qi. At the same time, you would learn how to lead the Qi in this vessel up to the head to nourish the brain and spirit (Shen). With this nourishment, you would be able to reach Buddhahood or enlightenment. From a health and longevity point of view, the raised spirit will be able to efficiently direct the Qi of the entire body and maintain your health.

[TOP](#)

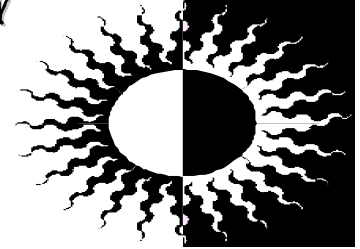
7. [The Yang Linking Vessel \(Yangwei Mai\)](#)

The Yang Linking vessel regulates the Qi mainly in the Yang channels: the urinary bladder, gall bladder, triple burner, small intestine, and stomach channels. It is also connected with the Governing vessel at Yamen (Gv-15) and Fengfu (Gv-16). This vessel and the Yang Heel vessel have not been emphasized

ACU-HEALTH MEDICAL CLINIC, INC.

TRADITIONAL & SPORTS ACUPUNCTURE HERBAL MEDICINE TUISHA MASSAGE

JOHN R. DEVLIN, O.M.D.
DIPLO. AC., DIPLO. C.H. (NCCAOM)



much in Qigong, except in Iron Shirt training where these two and the Governing vessel are trained.

[TOP](#)

8. The Yin Linking Vessel (Yinwei Mai)

The Yin Linking vessel has connections with the kidney, spleen, and liver Yin channels. The Yin Linking vessel also communicates with the Conception vessel at two cavities. This vessel is not trained much in Qigong.

[TOP](#)

From the book entitled "Chinese Qigong Massage",
[YMAA Publication Center](#), Jamaica Plain.

[Homepage](#) | [Back](#)