

The eight *extraordinary vessels* (qí mài) are not as well represented in the literature as the main organ meridians. They are mentioned in texts of the Hàn Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), but a complete analysis of their energetic pathways, master points, and treatment applications did not appear until the Míng Dynasty (1368 A.D. – 1644 A.D.) The individual qímài are not associated with any single organ system, instead serving to unite the functions of many different organs. And with two exceptions, they are not comprised of their own points; rather, they incorporate points from the other main meridians. These attributes mean they are more global in their functions, and many texts refer to their importance in determining overall body structure and symmetry as well as regulating such wide-spectrum networks as the endocrine system. In classical descriptions they serve as reservoirs for qì and blood, they interconnect individual organs, and they are intimately associated with the liver, kidneys, and curious organs.

During the Míng Dynasty, each of the eight qímài was placed in association with one of the eight trigrams: divination diagrams called guà, the basis of the *Yì Jīng* (*Book of Changes*). Yì, meaning *easy, change* or *exchange*, is a pictograph of a lizard, also associated with the dragon (bringer of rain and prosperity). The *Yì Jīng* was historically consulted to find one's way through the ever-changing situations presented by one's relations with others and the environment. It follows that the qímài should have some connection to this process. Most scholars feel that qímài theory is deeply rooted in Daoist philosophy and meditative practice. When studied from this perspective with the meanings of the trigrams in mind, the seemingly disparate functions that are listed for each qímài become more unified and predictable.

Trigrams consist of three lines vertically arranged. Each line can be either yáng (solid line) or yīn (split line), and their order determines the qualities and meaning of the trigram, described by a character word. Each trigram is associated with one of the eight directions and one of the eight winds; they describe grander unifying patterns than the five phases, the former being more heavenly (describing relationships among things) and the latter being more earthly (describing things themselves). They allude to the prerequisite energies needed for co-creative expression among individuals, and the relationships they describe both enable and are enabled by the natural tendencies of the five phase forms. (Please see the table at the end of this chapter for the trigram-phase correspondences.) The qímài carry these energies into and out of the body, helping to harmonize individual beings with their fellows and the environment, and coordinating the functions of individual organs into a unified whole. A study of the imagery of each trigram and its associated qímài can aid in understanding the intricate nature of harmonious interaction, and how one is both affected by and can affect one's context.

Mountain Trigram – two yīn lines underneath one yáng line. The character describing this trigram is gèn (turn around and look in the eye), commonly translated as *forthright, straightforward, or blunt*. More ancient meanings are *keeping still* and *sitting in lotus*. Its associated qímài is the yīn partner of a pair of “linking vessels” – wéi mài – each with a bilateral course. Wéi (fine thread + dove/phoenix) is translated as *to tie*, and suggests tying together what might otherwise disperse. Thus the yīn wéi mài coordinates all the yīn organs and meridians, including the coordination of one's inner feelings and personal truth. The above imagery combined suggests that a strong, calm, mountain-like presence in the world requires unity within, both physically and mentally. The quiet confidence of the sage begins with inner harmony.

This understanding provides insight into yīn wéi mài pathology, which covers a diverse array of issues including anxiety, restlessness, apathy, forgetfulness, vulnerability, difficulty in self-expression and speech, throat problems, thyroid problems, allergies, epilepsy, and a number of chest and abdominal disorders. The list is long, and overlaps

in many cases with the other qímài and with the main organ meridians. To decide if a particular ailment should be treated with the yīn wéi mài, one must have a feel for the whole patient and decide if the mountain imagery suits. An example would be a dog who is always nervous and excitable, runs from bigger dogs, often hiccoughs (unable to take a calm breath), and suffers brief episodes of sudden hind limb lameness due to a luxating patella (a growth deformity allowing the kneecap to slide in and out of position).

Thunder Trigram – one yáng line underneath two yīn lines. Its descriptive character is zhèn (rain + cliff + sprouting plants like daggers following stars above), commonly translated as *to shake, tremble, or lightning bolt*. Another version shows rain falling from clouds over a character meaning shock, translated as *arousal, shock, quake, thunder, and taking action*. Zhèn suggests that which gets things moving, the way thunder announces the arrival of Spring and arouses all who were hibernating. Its associated qímài is the yáng wéi mài, which coordinates all the yáng organs and meridians, including the coordination of one's outward expression and action. For harmonious co-creativity to take place out in the world, a working connection and effective communication between self and other has to be established in a clear and unified fashion. Otherwise, the individual lacks a sense of where and when to initiate personal action, and lacks synchronicity with the actions of others and the natural cycles of the environment.

Yáng wéi mài pathology includes many ailments of the sensory organs (including the organs of touch and physical contact), the organs of expression (including face, mouth and hands), and the physiologic events that initiate new activity, especially those that must be synchronized with other events (birthing labor, blood clotting cascade, coordinated movement of the limbs, synchronized pumping of the four heart chambers). An example would be a puppy who was raised alone so she tends to send the wrong behavior signals to other dogs, as a juvenile suffers from elbow dysplasia (uncoordinated bone growth) and Spring allergies, and as an adult develops cataracts and facial nerve paralysis. Another would be an indoor-only cat who develops heart disease and throws a blood clot toward the hind legs causing paralysis.

Both the yīn and yáng wéi mài have to do with connection, inward and outward, and the synchronization of those connections to create unified presence and action. It is no surprise then that their master treatment points lie on the pericardium and triple heater meridians respectively. These points, however, like the other qímài master points, address issues and organs far beyond the one organ meridian on which they're located.

Wind Trigram – one yīn line underneath two yàng lines. Its descriptive character is xùn (two snakes proceeding together), translated as *proceeding humbly, gentleness, and penetration*. The wind enfolds these properties, able to wind its way around and through things in a persistent yet gentle manner. Xùn suggests going with the natural flow of things to move most harmoniously with others. Its associated qímài is the “girdling vessel” – dài mài – which encircles the trunk below the ribs, binding the other channels and regulating the flow of qì between the upper and lower parts of the body. Dài (belt with pendants + cloth) is translated as *belt, sash, band, region, zone, to carry, to take, and to bring*. Once action has been initiated, to proceed with grace and efficiency one must move around or through potential obstacles with a flexible understanding of one's sphere of momentum. Others may move with or against that momentum depending on their own natural path and personal boundaries. The dài mài aids wind-like movement by enhancing unified momentum of all one's qì through one's personal path without butting up against that of others.

Dài mài pathology includes many musculoskeletal disorders (lack of flexibility, tendency to stub the toe, dropping what the hand was carrying, lumbar pain, muscle spasms, ribcage pain), surface disorders (contact allergies, trigeminal neuralgia, fibromyalgia), and disorders arising from an inability of qì or fluids to pass easily through an area, resulting in an uneven distribution (swelling/heat at the elbow with numbness/cold of the hand). A horse suffering from dài mài pathology might exhibit odd

limb movements when backing up, have trouble changing leads, or have a habit of casually running over people.

The master treatment point for the *dài mài* is located on the gallbladder meridian, which suits its role in harmonious movement.

Fire Trigram – a yīn line in between two yàng lines. Its descriptive character is lí (yak + short-tailed bird with bright feathers), variously translated as *oriole*, *flaming beauty*, *brightness*, *to leave/depart*, or *to attach/cling*. The yak pictograph provides the sound of the lì character, but also adds to its meaning. The ancient Chinese domesticated the yak at least 4,500 years ago for use in carrying loads and as a source of milk, meat, hides, and dung (used for fuel in areas above the tree line). The yak’s ability to thrive in harsh environments was a crucial factor in allowing Chinese culture to emerge and prosper in remote areas. Lì in the Yì Jīng can mean attaching to something for safety, clinging to another during times of darkness, coming together to create prosperity, or radiating brightness that attracts others. Its associated qímài is the “conception vessel” – rèn mài – which runs straight up the midline of the front of the body; it is one of only two qímài with its own acupuncture points. Rèn (person + pole for carrying work) is commonly translated as *to appoint*, *to let/allow*, and *to assume a post*. Coming together as a group for any reason (huddling for warmth, sharing a meal, raising a family, creating prosperity) requires the act of allowing others into one’s personal space and accepting a beneficial role that helps the group. If that role flows with one’s inner nature (dé) the relationship benefits everyone; if not, the role becomes a burden which may eventually necessitate leaving. A healthy relationship also requires not clinging too tightly to the group or one’s role in it.

Rèn mài pathology includes disorders related to allowing something new into one’s life or one’s body (difficulty swallowing, diseases of the oral cavity, breathing and lung problems, digestion problems, pregnancy issues), disorders related to carrying a burden or serving a prescribed role (hernias and musculoskeletal disorders from load-bearing, breast and lactation problems, uterine diseases, repetitive stress disorders), and disorders related to “clinging” (anxiety, retained fetus or placenta, urinary retention and cystitis, constipation, congealed blood, coalescing lumps, hand spasms). An example would be an old stiff lackluster cart-horse who develops shoulder problems and is prone to smegma accumulation (called a “bean”) in his sheath causing difficult and painful urination; another would be a young puppy with severe separation anxiety who later in life develops allergic bronchitis and lipomas (benign fatty lumps).

The rèn mài’s master point lies on the lung meridian; if a relationship and the roles of its participants flow harmoniously, its comings and goings are as easy and natural as breathing.

Earth Trigram – three yīn lines. Its descriptive character is kūn (soil from which all things extend), commonly translated as *earth* or *female*, but in the Yì Jīng variously translated as *extension*, *submission*, *responding*, *receptive* or *passive*. It is the ability to respond to, nurture, and sustain creative direction. Its associated qímài is the yīn partner of a pair of “motility vessels” – qiāo mài. Qiāo is a combination of foot and lower leg (foot, leg, sufficient) and earth piled up on a stool. It suggests *feet up high* or *to raise one’s feet*. Combined with kūn, yīn qiāo suggests the act of following direction with nurturing and support. It also suggests being supported by others in one’s own creative endeavors. Mutual responding/supporting is the mark of a healthy relationship.

Yīn qiāo mài pathology includes ailments related to an inability to respond (fatigue, paralysis, coma, impotence, poor circulation and edema, eyes unable to open, sleep disorders, late labor), an inability to nourish or sustain (lactation problems, sterility, miscarriage, poor assimilation of nutrients, poor stamina), and issues involving support or steadiness (uterine prolapse, rectal prolapse, weakness or tension of the supporting muscles, seasickness, vertigo). An example would be an older dog with laryngeal paralysis, fecal incontinence and weak legs that tremble when he stands too long.

The yīn qiāo mài's master point lies on the kidney meridian; water is the basic foundation of physical life, supporting and sustaining all creative endeavors.

Lake Trigram – one yīn line above two yáng lines. Its descriptive character is *dùì* (person with mouth split), whose ancient meaning was *rejoice*, and whose modern translation is *exchange* or *trade*. The pictograph in the Yì Jīng shows an open mouth singing, with dancing legs below and arms swaying above. It can mean *joy*, *exchange*, *lake*, or *marsh* (a rich environment supporting a grand diversity of life). The health of the lake or marsh is reflected in the health of its plants and animals, the nature of its quiet depths reflected in its active surface. Undulating waves created by exchange with the energies of the wind are countered by the resoluteness of the deep unseen. The qímài associated with *dùì* is called the “governing vessel” – *dū mài* – which runs straight up the midline of the back of the body; it is the other qímài with its own acupuncture points. *Dū* (beans collected by hand, or to pick, + eye) has the common meaning *to supervise*. Given its close anatomic relationship with the spinal cord and brain (central nervous system), the *dū mài* is aptly considered the governing vessel of the body, exchanging information with all other body systems, organizing its patterns, and synthesizing appropriate responses and directives. This and the *chōng mài* (next section) are called the Way of the twelve meridians.

The combined imagery of *dùì* and *dū* inspires several different meanings. One's inner nature (*dé*) is reflected in one's exchanges with others. To learn from these exchanges is to learn about one's *dé* and that of others. Then adjustments can be made that reflect personal truth with more authenticity, and that more clearly reveal the truth of others. However, in keeping with the nature of the *Dào*, one's *dé* is constantly changing. Those whose self-concept is too structured can't adjust and demand very structured relationships that don't favor diversity or richness. Conversely, if the pattern of one's relationships changes too quickly or too often, or if one has difficulty seeing one's own reflection in the world (literally picking it out of a myriad possibilities), there is no basis for useful exchange and one simply feels lost, confused and empty...possibly progressing to psychosis. Healthy exchange requires the ability to recognize oneself and the meaning of one's actions within a complex tapestry of co-creative events. Then one can effectively experience, in a *wúwèi* fashion, the interactions described by all the other trigrams.

Dū mài pathology includes ailments affecting the organs of exchange: eyes (inflammation, glaucoma, corneal diseases), ears (deafness, deaf-mutism, tinnitus), speech organs (stroke, tonsillitis, throat spasms), lungs (fullness, cough, panting), skin (hard and scabby skin, scabies, sweating disorders), and hands (finger spasms, hand numbness or pain). It also includes ailments related to structural rigidity (back/limb pain and tension, sciatica, tetanus, stiff neck, wry-neck, headaches, seizures) and mental/emotional issues (madness, phobias, anxiety, melancholy, lack of concentration, insomnia). An example of *dū mài* pathology would be a horse who has had so many different trainers and riders (all giving her different cues and corrections) that she becomes nervous and nippy, holds so much tension that she develops back problems, and finally can't exercise because of heaves (a respiratory condition).

The *dū mài*'s master point lies on the small intestine meridian, fitting with its role in selecting: making choices and decisions that clearly reflect one's truth.

Heaven Trigram – three yáng lines. Its descriptive character is *qián* (plants sprouting toward early light), whose modern translation is *heaven*, but whose ancient form (sun with young grass leaves above and roots below adjacent to an image of *qì* spreading out under the sky) is variously translated as *initiating*, *creating*, *vitality* and *healthy action*. Its associated qímài is the “penetrating vessel” – *chōng mài* – which runs straight up the midline of the body's interior, in front of the spine. The *chōng mài* is called the ocean of the organs and meridians, the ocean of blood, and (along with the *dū mài*) the way of the twelve meridians. It is said to initiate creation from the source *qì* and nourish what is created. *Chōng* (step/left step + standing person with sun rising behind a tree + stop/right

step) is translated as *charge, rush, or toward*; its ancient meaning was *open road*. Some authors also relate chōng to the processes of transformation – specifically alchemical transformation in which individual entities react to create something new. This type of transformation is huà (person transformed: *transform, change*), a character often used in relation to chemistry. It is a more profound alteration than that involved in the transition from one phase to another – biàn (strike + continuous: *alter, become, modify*).

Qián suggests the type of creative and transformative energy that is exemplified by the interaction of the sun with plants: as the sun illuminates the leaves, its energy is used to perform photosynthesis (the transformation of inorganic carbon to organic carbon and the production of oxygen), a process crucial to creative life. Similarly, as one interacts with others a profound change of both self and other is possible if the energy of that interaction is allowed to penetrate deeply. Chōng suggests the ongoing progression and permeation of qián (creative influence) within the individual. On a physical level, blood vessels carry influences from both the outside world (nutrients and oxygen) and from one organ to another (hormones) to all the cells of the body where they are used to supply and initiate biochemical reactions. On a more subtle level, meridians carry the qì from outside influences and other organs that permeate an organ, interact with its source qì, and cause change. Thus the chōng mài regulates the initiation of co-creative transformation in the individual.

Chōng mài pathology includes ailments of the blood vessels and heart (angina pectoris, heart pain, circulatory problems and any secondary respiratory or digestive issues, palpitations, rheumatic heart disease, feeling of fullness in the chest or face), uterine problems (difficult or late menses, endometritis), and issues related to the permeation of influences into the body or between organs (stagnation of qì or nutrients causing pain or swelling, lack of appetite, vomiting, intestinal cramping, bloating, jaundice, yawning or sighing, diaphragm problems, pancreatitis). Mental problems would be expected to include any disturbance of the heart's shén (awareness), and difficulty incorporating new information into creative thought. A young dog suffering from chōng mài pathology might have a liver shunt with secondary jaundice, stunted growth, a small heart, mental depression, and seizures.

The chōng mài's master point lies on the spleen meridian in keeping with its role of easy permeation – an inherently passive process if unhindered, like sunshine being absorbed into leaves, illuminating them.

There is one final concept related to qián and chōng that bears emphasis. Just as transformation within plants results in the production of oxygen that fills the air and influences other organisms, so too does transformation within the individual (jīng) produce qì that then becomes an influence on others and the environment. In this way one becomes another “heavenly influence,” and changes the very context of one's existence. This is not an active process, like moving a chair or building a dam; it is a passive process, like a field in physics affecting the movement of particles – the way the sage is said to influence others just by being.

Water Trigram – one yáng line between two yīn lines. Its descriptive character is kǎn (ground + yawn/exhale), suggesting a dip in the ground that induces exhalation when fallen into; its translation is *dip*. The ancient pictograph shows ground and a person standing on one foot with the other held up; some versions also show a pit under the person. Its translations include *pit, falling, darkness, and abyss*, all of which intimate the seeming danger of the unknown. Kǎn is associated with water since most Chinese lived inland and the oceans represented unknown dangers. Its qímài is the yáng qiāo mài (motility vessel) – the yáng version of *raising one's feet*. Combined with kǎn, yáng qiāo suggests the ability to actively step into the unknown, which is what one has to do when entering a new relationship or situation. And because the path and those who walk it are ever changing, each step is always new to some extent. The Yì Jīng says if one is cautious yet calm, stepping faithfully from the heart in a sincere and honest way, one can walk as though on solid ground and one's actions can turn potential danger into

prosperous opportunity. The nature of water is to flow, but it must fill the pit before it can flow out of it; to flow in life requires the type of wisdom gained by filling the unknown with awareness and experience.

Yáng qiāo mài pathology includes any musculoskeletal issue affecting upward or forward movement (lumbago, sciatica, spasms and cramps, weakness, paralysis), issues related to steady and balanced movement (dizziness, epilepsy, one-sided pain or weakness, torticollis, mouth and eyes awry, difficulty standing up), and any issue related to facing outside dangers and seeing the way through (loss of speech, inability to concentrate, eye problems, myopia, headaches, fear, phobias, mania, anxiety, excitement, palpitations, stroke, sweating, infections, dread of wind). An example would be an overly cautious horse who tends to be violently fearful in the wind, suffers frequent eye infections, and has trouble rising due to chronic hip pain and muscle tension.

The yáng qiāo mài's master treatment point lies on the bladder meridian, which fits with the concept of water as a symbol of the unknown as well as the bladder as the yáng aspect of water (active, flowing, and emerging – the first form raised from unseen mystery).

Each qímài can be treated alone, or in combination with each other and any of the main organ meridians. Through tongue and pulse evaluation, history taking, and body and point palpation an experienced practitioner gleans which patterns need addressing. This process is greatly aided by studying the imagery of the Chinese characters that describe TCM physiology. Then, to borrow once more from Zhuāngzǐ, a deep experiential understanding (meaning) is what guides treatment rather than a memorized list of organ functions and point formulas (words). This way of practicing medicine is more subjective and relative than some would like, but it also carries with it the greater potential. Each unique interpretation of TCM concepts brings with it new possibilities for healing on many different levels.