

Pairing the Extraordinary Vessels and the Extraordinary *Fu*

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Abstract

This article presents a theoretical model that pairs the extraordinary *fu* with the extraordinary vessels, similar to the way in which the *zangfu* are paired with the primary channels. First, the *ren*, *chong*, and *du mai* are paired with the Uterus, *mai*/Blood Vessels, and Brain, respectively, using the perspective of the three *dantian* and the three treasures. This discussion suggests that the *du mai* may be seen as the Sea of *Shen*, thereby helping to resolve why both the Heart and the Brain have been said to be the residence of the *shen* in the history of Chinese medicine. Secondly, the *qiao*, *wei*, and *dai mai* are paired with the Marrow, Bones, and Gall Bladder, respectively, by looking at certain functional and relational correspondences between them.

Introduction

In this paper I would like to propose a model in which the extraordinary *fu* are paired with the extraordinary vessels, similar to the way in which the *zangfu* are paired with the primary channels. It is my intent to put forward a perspective in which these seemingly disparate aspects of the medicine may be seen with a greater degree of integration, not only within themselves but also with the other foundational aspects of Chinese medicine. To examine these ideas, I will look at correspondences between the extraordinary vessels and the extraordinary *fu* using the perspective of the three *dantian* and the three treasures, as well as structural, functional and relational correspondences.

Correspondences Between the Extraordinary Vessels and *Fu*

Although not much discourse about the relationship between the extraordinary vessels and the extraordinary *fu* is located in the literature, there are several authors who discuss the correspondences in part. For example, both Giovanni Maciocia (2005) and Jeffrey Yuen (2005) mention connections. These correspondences are, however, fairly general, and indicate several overlaps between the vessels and *fu*. According to Yuen (2005), connections can be seen between the Brain and the *du*, *qiao*, and *ren mai*; between the Uterus and the *ren*, *chong*, *du*, and *dai mai*; and between the Gall Bladder and the *dai* and *wei mai*, among others. Maciocia (2005) also offers the following correspondences: Brain: *du* and *qiao mai*; Uterus: *chong* and *ren mai*; Blood vessels: *chong mai*; Gall Bladder: *dai mai*; Marrow: *chong* and *du mai*; Bones: *chong*, *du*, and *ren mai*. Many of these connections come from the pathways of the vessels, as well as confluence of function. However, it is also possible that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the extraordinary vessels and *fu*, that they pertain to each other similarly to the way that the primary channels and *zangfu* pertain to each other.¹

At first this may not seem plausible, as there are eight extraordinary meridians, while only six extraordinary *fu*. However, in many of the classics the *yin* and *yang qiao mai* are simply referred to as the *qiao mai*, and similarly for the *wei mai*. Therefore, for purposes of this model, I will place the *yin* and *yang* aspects of the *qiao* and *wei mai* each together as one channel, similar to the way in which each interiorly-exteriorly related primary channel pair corresponds to one set of

zangfu. This would then leave us with six extraordinary meridians, and the pairings may be posited as follows:

Ren mai - Uterus
Chong mai – Blood vessels (*mai*)
Du mai – Brain

Qiao mai – Marrow
Wei mai – Bones
Dai mai – Gall Bladder

To examine these pairings, I will first examine the Uterus, Blood vessels, and Brain together as a set, and then turn to the Marrow, Bones, and Gall Bladder.

The Three *Dantian*: Uterus, *Mai*, and Brain

The perspective of the three *dantian* provides a perfect lens through which to examine the correspondences of the *ren*, *du*, and *chong mai* with the Uterus, Brain, and Vessels, respectively. Within the three *dantian*, the lower *dantian* is in correspondence with Earth, the upper *dantian* is in correspondence with Heaven, and the middle *dantian* may be seen as being in correspondence with humanity—as humanity is the coming together of Heaven and Earth.¹ The three *dantian* thus correspond to the vertical axis of integration; this is the connection between above and below, between heaven, earth, and humanity, at both the macro- and microcosmic level.

This trinity is also reflected in the three treasures of *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*. *Jing* is the dense, material, *yin* substance, the essence, the physical basis for experiential reality that corresponds to Earth and the lower *dantian*. *Shen* is the ethereal, the spirit, the pure awareness that corresponds to heaven, *yang*, and the upper *dantian*. *Qi* is the connection between *jing* and *shen* in the process of internal alchemy, and regulates the connection between above and below and the inside and the outside (vertical and horizontal integration) and thus corresponds to humanity and the middle *dantian*.

As the extraordinary *fu* relate to the deep, constitutional, pre-heaven aspects of being, it makes sense that they would have connections to the three *dantian* and the three treasures, which are foundational aspects in the formation and physiology of the human being.² The literature (as well as the anatomy of the body) suggests that the Uterus corresponds to the lower *dantian* and *jing*, and the Brain corresponds to the upper *dantian* and *shen*. As noted by Jeffrey Yuen (2006, p. 69), “The *Jing* Essence begins in the level of the Uterus”.³ And Li Shi Zhen stated that: ‘*The Brain is the Palace of the Original Shen*’ (as cited in: Maciocia 2005, p. 231).

Which extraordinary *fu* would then be in correspondence with the middle *dantian*? This may be the *mai*/Blood Vessels. It is at the level of the middle *dantian* that we find the Heart and the greatest concentration of *mai*—the blood vessels of cardio-pulmonary circulation as well as the major vessels relating to systemic circulation. Further, it has been said (Maciocia 2005, p. 233) that “...the Blood Vessels are primarily influenced by the Heart as this governs Blood and

¹ This is also seen in yoga, where the 4th chakra is symbolized by a triangle overlapping an inverted triangle, which represents the coming together of shiva and shakti energies.

controls blood vessels, but also by the Lungs as they control all channels and vessels,” and also (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 2003, p. 108) that “There is a strong relationship between the *mai* and the heart because the heart is the master of the *mai*,” both of which point to the middle *dantian* as the center of the *mai*.⁴ Therefore, it is possible that the lower, middle and upper *dantian* (and *jing*, *qi* and *shen*) correspond to the Uterus, *mai*, and Brain, respectively, and we can now turn to look at their relation to the extraordinary vessels.

The Seas of *Jing*, *Qi*, and *Shen*: *Ren*, *Chong*, and *Du Mai*

The *ren* and *du mai* may be seen as the fundamental division of *yin* and *yang* within the channel system, corresponding to the deep, interior source as it is just beginning to form the polarity of earth and heaven within the human being. Thus they are often referred to as the Sea of Yin (*ren mai*) and the Sea of Yang (*du mai*). If we look at the *ren* and *du mai* in relation to the three treasures and the three *dantian*, we can see that the *ren mai*, in being the Sea of Yin, has a strong correspondence to Earth, *jing*, the lower *dantian*, and the Uterus. Similarly we can see that the *du mai*, in being the Sea of Yang, has a strong correspondence to Heaven, *shen*, the upper *dantian*, and the Brain. These associations are reinforced by the *ren mai*'s direct connection to the Uterus, and the *du mai*'s direct connection to the Brain.⁵ The lower and upper *dantian* are reflections of each other, just as the *ren* and *du mai* mirror each other; each form a polarity of *yin* and *yang*, body/*jing* and spirit/*shen*. As noted by Yuen (2006, p. 74), “You see the mirror image between the Uterus and the Brain, between *Ren* and its connection to the *Du*, *Yin* and *Yang* giving birth to each other in many ways”.

For this reason, the *ren mai* could perhaps be called the Sea of *Jing*, and the *du mai* the Sea of *Shen*. This would then go a long way in explaining why, in the history of Chinese medicine, some have said that the Brain is the residence of the *shen*, while others have said that the Heart is the residence of the *shen*. If instead we think of the *du mai* as the Sea of *Shen*, and understand that the *du mai* has an intimate connection with all three *dantian*, then it becomes clear that all three of these areas are major concentrations of awareness/*shen*, and that the *du mai* may assist in the movement of the *shen* between these major energetic centers.⁶

And, as with all polarities, there is something that simultaneously connects and separates the *yin* and *yang* aspects of the *ren* and *du mai*: the *chong mai*. As noted by Kiiko Matsumoto and Stephen Birch (1986, p.16), Li Shi Zhen stated that: “*The ren mai and du mai make contact together at the chong mai.*” They go on to say that: “He explains this statement by noting that the *ren mai* and *du mai* are the fundamental divisions of *yin* and *yang* in the body. The *chong mai* insures the inseparability of oneness of the *ren* and *du mai*, the *yin* and *yang* functions”. Just as humanity is found between heaven and earth, the *chong mai* is found between the *ren* and the *du mai*.⁷

In the model of the three *dantian*, the *chong mai* then takes its place in correspondence with the level of humanity—the middle *dantian*. This also corresponds to the level of *qi* in the three treasures, and the *mai*/Blood Vessels in the extraordinary *fu*. From this perspective, it is interesting to note that the *chong mai* has variously been referred to as the “Sea of Blood,” the “Sea of the 5 *zang* and the 6 *fu*,” and the “Sea of the 12 channels,” and is said to be able to treat blood stagnation anywhere in the body. It is also of note that one of the indications of *Gongsun* SP-4 (confluent point of the *chong mai*) is heart pain, and also that one of the pathways of the

chong mai disperses in the chest region. Thus we can see that there are significant correspondences between the *ren*, *du*, and *chong mai* with the Uterus, Brain, and *mai*; these pairings resonate with the three *dantian* and the three treasures, and thus correspond to the vertical axis of integration within the body.

***Qiao Mai* and Marrow: Global Nourishment by the Essence**

“*Qiao*” is often translated as motility. If the ‘*yin*’ and ‘*yang*’ *qiao mai* are related to the motility and movement of *yin* and *yang*, they can be seen as having a strong relation to the mobilization of the essence as it arises from the source. In Chinese physiology, the essence first transforms into *yin* and *yang*, which then go out to become the basis of *yin* and *yang* throughout the entire body.⁸ Similarly, the Marrow is often discussed as a mobile form of the essence—the essence that fills the spinal cord, Brain, and bony cavities and “moves” through the body.⁹

While the Brain as an extraordinary *fu* corresponds to the *du mai*, it may be that the *qiao mai* are responsible, in part, for nourishing the Brain. This is seen in the pathway of the *qiao mai*—both start at the malleoli, and from here flow up to meet at *Jingming* BL-1 and enter the Brain:

The *qiao mai* represent the first division and repartition of *yin* and *yang*... with a meeting point not only at the inner corner of the eyes but also in the depths of the brain. Beginning in the middle of the heel they touch the power of the earth. They provide a kind of rooting in the earth, and taking from below the forces to make all the earthly *qi*, the *yin*, essences, water and nutritive power rise up inside the body (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 1997; p. 203).¹⁰

Therefore, the *qiao mai* may be seen as carrying the essence from “earth” (which may refer to both the macrocosmic Earth as well as the lower *dantian*) up to the Brain, the Sea of Marrow. This process also reflects the movement of Marrow up to the Brain: “The commentators said that the marrow circulates following the hollows inside the bones, and thus rises up to be in free communication with the brain” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 2003, p. 97). Thus both the *qiao mai* and the Marrow may have an intimate relationship to global nourishment by the essence, and particularly the nourishment of the Brain.

It is also of note that the Marrow is sometimes referred to as *jing* plus *shen* (Yuen 2006). This then relates to the above discussion of the *ren* and *du mai* being in resonance with *jing* and *shen*, respectively. If the *qiao mai* are seen as a development out of the *ren* and *du mai*, the initiation of movement in the Sea of Yin/*jing* and Sea of Yang/*shen* (as they are master-couple pairs), then they can be seen as relating to the *jing* and *shen* as they move and spiral through the body.¹¹ This provides another direct connection between the *yin* and *yang qiao mai* (the movement of *jing* and *shen*) and the Marrow (“*jing* plus *shen*”).

Another interesting correlation between the Marrow and the *qiao mai* can be seen by looking at *Su Wen* Chapter 17: “The bones are the palace of the marrow. If one cannot stand for prolonged periods or walk with stability, this means that the bones are about to be exhausted” (Ni 1995, p. 64). It can be inferred from this quote that the Marrow is responsible for nourishing the Bones, and that the Marrow is therefore ultimately responsible for the ability to walk and stand—thus

when there are problems with walking or standing the Marrow is no longer nourishing the Bones. Interestingly, issues of gait are usually an indication of an imbalance in the *qiao mai* (the “Walker” vessels).

Further support of this connection between the *qiao mai* and the Marrow is also seen in that the Marrow pertains to the Kidneys, and the confluent points of both the *yin* and *yang qiao mai* are found on the Kidney and Bladder channels. Also, it has been said that “The Yang Motility vessel... enters the brain at *Fengfu Du-16*”; *Fengfu DU-16* is also a point of the Sea of Marrow (Deadman 2005, p. 321).

***Wei Mai* and Bones: Integration and Protection**

In turning to the *wei mai* and Bones, at first glance it may seem as though there is very little correlation between these extraordinary meridians and *fu*. However, if we think of the *wei mai* as relating to protection and the creation of boundaries that connect (“link”) the inside and the outside, and the Bones as protecting the internal organs and connecting and separating the inside and the outside (*zangfu* and primary channels, pre-heaven and post-heaven), then we can start to see a relation between the *wei mai* and Bones.¹²

The Bones form the three cavities (pelvic, thoracic, and cranial) that protect the internal organs, creating boundaries that sustain the structure of the body as well as separate the *zangfu*, core, and interior from the primary channels, limbs, and exterior. “...bones are the framework for the human body, like the trunk of a tree, and they stick to the flesh. They are also able to protect the *zang* on the interior, as in the thoracic cage, which is something like the hull of a ship” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 2003, p. 91). Similarly, the *wei mai* are also closely related to protection and connecting and separating the inside and the outside: “The two Linking vessels harmonize Interior-Exterior and Nutritive Qi-Defensive Qi” (Maciocia 2005, p. 828).

The Bones are one of the main structures associated with the entering and exiting of *qi*: “Qi enters and exits from the bones on its way to and from the deep energetic layers of the body” (Maciocia 2005, p. 83). This “entering and exiting” of *qi* relates to horizontal integration, and is also a primary function of the *wei mai*: “...commentators have said that the *yang wei mai* masters the exterior and the movement towards the exterior, and the *yin wei* masters the interior and the movement towards the interior” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 1997, p. 214). Thus both the *wei mai* and the Bones may relate to the horizontal level of integration as represented by the entering and exiting of *qi*, connecting the interior and the exterior.

Interestingly, the *wei mai* are also said to start on the Kidney and Bladder channels. Just as both Marrow and Bones are said to pertain to the Kidneys, both the *qiao* and *wei mai* are said to start on these water channels. Just as the Marrow nourishes the Bones, it may be that the *qiao mai* nourish the *wei mai*, in this process of expanding out from the Source and connecting the inside and the outside. Just as we saw above that the Marrow and the *qiao mai* both have an intimate relationship to the mobilization and movement of the essence from the Source to nourish the entire body, so too can it be seen that the *wei mai* and the Bones have an intimate relationship to integration, protection, and boundaries.

Gall Bladder and *Dai Mai*: Returning to a State of Oneness

In pairing the extraordinary vessels and *fu*, the *dai mai* will clearly be the extraordinary vessel that corresponds to the Gall Bladder. In order to examine this connection, I will focus on the function of both the Gall Bladder and the *dai mai* to facilitate the return to Source and tonify the Kidneys/pre-heaven.¹³

Previously in the history of Chinese medicine, there were some who thought that it was not possible to reach the Kidneys or the essence directly, and that the way to make this connection was through the Gall Bladder.¹⁴ This is also seen with the *dai mai*, which binds the *ren*, *du* and *chong mai* at the level of the lower *dantian*, and through this connection may help one to return to the Source and pre-heaven state, in the evolution of consciousness as mirrored by the extraordinary vessels (Richardson 2009). As stated by Larre and Rochat de la Vallée (1997, p. 148), the *dai mai* "...conducts the *qi* of the whole organism in the correct direction and to its final destination". Thus it may be that the *dai mai* and the Gall Bladder both play a role in connecting the post-heaven *qi* and essence of the Spleen with the pre-heaven *qi* and essence of the Kidneys at the Source.¹⁵

In looking at the Gall Bladder channel, we can see this process reflected on the hypochondriac region. Here one finds *Riyue* GB-24, the front-*mu* point of the Gall Bladder, followed by a meeting point of the Gall Bladder channel with *Zhangmen* LIV-13, the front-*mu* point of the Spleen and *hui*-meeting of the *zang*, as well as the starting point of the *dai mai*. This is then followed by *Jingmen* GB-25, the front-*mu* point of the Kidneys. So right here there is a transition of accessing the Gall Bladder *qi* directly at *Riyue* GB-24, which is then (perhaps) involved in connecting the post-heaven of the Spleen (accessed at *Zhangmen* LIV-13) with the pre-heaven of the Kidneys (at *Jingmen* GB-25), thereby directly nourishing the Kidneys. It is also right here that there is the starting point of the *dai mai* (again, at *Zhangmen* LIV-13), which, in addition to connecting with *Daimai* GB-26, *Wushu* GB-27, and *Weidao* GB-28, is said (according to some sources) to connect with *Shenshu* BL-23 (back-*shu* of the Kidneys) and *Mingmen* DU-4, as well as the *ren*, *du*, and *chong mai*, thus replenishing the pre-heaven of the Kidneys (and the quiescent state of the extraordinary vessels, as seen in (Richardson 2009 (2))).

Summary of the Pairings

To summarize, we can see a strong relationship between the extraordinary vessels and the extraordinary *fu*. In this model, the *ren mai* and Uterus pertain to the lower *dantian* and relate to *jing*, the *du mai* and the Brain pertain to the upper *dantian* and relate to *shen*, and the *chong mai* and the *mai* pertain to the middle *dantian* and relate to *qi* and blood. These three pairs create the vertical axis of integration within the body, corresponding to the relatively pre-heaven, quiescent state of the Source as it first unfolds into the polarity of heaven, earth, and humanity within the human body, as mirrored by the three *dantian*.

From this point we can see an expansion outward with the *qiao mai* and Marrow, both of which relate to the movement of the essence from the Source, as it expands out to nourish the internal organs and tissues (as well as the Bones and the *wei mai*). The *wei mai* and the Bones both assist in the process of integration and protection, creating the boundaries that simultaneously connect and separate the inside and the outside. Finally, the Gall Bladder and *dai mai* assist in guiding the *qi* from post-heaven back to pre-heaven to nourish the lower *dantian*, Kidneys, and *ren*, *du* and *chong mai*. Pairing the extraordinary vessels and the extraordinary *fu* in this manner, it

becomes easier to see their relation to creating and sustaining the individual human being. This process of vertical integration, horizontal integration, and the return to source reflects the evolution of consciousness, and allows one to deepen the experience of the art of humanity on a continual basis.

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¹ Nor is this in conflict with the correspondences put forth by Yuen, Maciocia, and others. It is quite possible that there are overlapping correspondences of several extraordinary vessels to the extraordinary *fu* at the same time that there is a primary, one-to-one correspondence—just as there are sometimes several primary meridians that will pass through or relate to any given *zangfu*, at the same time that there are primary correspondences between each *zang* and *fu* and its related channel.

² As noted by Larre and Rochat de la Vallée, the extraordinary *fu* “...are closer to the original formation of the body, and they are also more ancient, primitive and deep and more able to ensure the continuity of life...” (2003, p. 205).

³ It should be noted that the Uterus, as an extraordinary *fu*, is present in both men and women: “The Uterus was called *Zi Bao* in Chinese medicine. *Bao* is actually a structure that is common to both men and women and is in the Lower Field of Elixir (*Dan Tian*): in men, *Bao* is the ‘Room of Essence’; in women, it is the Uterus” (Maciocia 2005, p. 225).

⁴ It is also from the Heart and the middle *dantian* that there are blood vessels regulating circulation between the Heart and the Brain (upper *dantian*) as well as between the Heart and the Uterus (lower *dantian*).

⁵ In discussing Nan Jing Difficulty 28, Larre and Rochat state that: “In this description the text says the *du mai*...enters the brain with a *shu* (...) relationship. *Shu* represents the idea of belonging to something... In the description of each of the twelve meridians this relationship of belonging is the special connection between a meridian and its viscera, and the *luo* (...) relationship is the special relationship with the coupled viscera... The relationship of the *du mai* with the brain is both *luo* and *shu*... It is exactly as if the *du mai* is the link to the brain in all ways” (Larre and Rochat 2003, p. 39-40).

⁶ The *du mai* is said to start in the lower *dantian*, has a channel that passes through the Heart and Kidneys (making it the only extraordinary vessel to pass through a *zangfu* organ), and directly connects to the Brain. These three areas correspond to the levels of the three *dantian*, as seen above. As stated by Maciocia (2005, p. 843), “Thus, the Governing Vessel has a strong influence on the mental-emotional state because it is the channel connection between the Kidneys, Heart and Brain...”. Considering that the Blood houses the *shen*, it is also of note that the three *dantian* (Uterus, Heart/*mai*, and Brain) are also major areas of blood circulation.

⁷ Also see Lonny Jarrett (2004, p. 8): “Note that *chongmai*..., one of the eight extra meridians, possesses the function of blending the influences of heaven and earth, and *yin* and *yang*, as they are mediated by the conception and governor vessels, respectively”.

⁸ The relation of the *qiao mai* to this transformation may also be inferred from the literature: “The commentators of the Nan Jing and other texts suggest that the *zang* and the innermost are irrigated by the *yin qiao mai*, and the *fu* are watered by the *yang qiao mai*. This is just another way to show the total impregnation in the rising up movement of the *yin* and *yang* of the body. This could be interpreted as the *zang* and the *fu*, or the inner and outer parts of the body, or the front and the back – all interpretations are possible, because the main function of the *qiao mai* is to rule the exchanges and to create equilibrium between the *yin* and the *yang* at every level” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 1997, p. 174).

⁹ “In books of the same period there is a definition of marrow as a great liquid which flows. One of the differences between the brain and the marrow is that the brain is like a sea, immobile and fixed...but what flows into the sea is circulating and this is the marrow, the qi, the nourishment, the meridians and the blood...One of the main functions of the marrow is to circulate and irrigate, to flow into the bones, the skull, the hollows and the orifices. This is the movement of the marrow inside the bones” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 2003, p. 92-93).

¹⁰ This is also reinforced by the name of this point: “*Jing ming*... gives the idea both of light and of the illumination coming from irrigation by the essences. *Jing*...here...is referring to nothing other than the gathering together of the essences (*jing*...) of the five *zang* and the six *fu*...This is another way to show how all the vitality is brought to the upper orifices and to the brain by the workings of the *qiao mai*” (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 1997, p. 173).

¹¹ This may help to explain the master-couple pairing of the *yin qiao mai* and *ren mai*, and the *yang qiao mai* and *du mai*—the *ren mai* may be seen as the Sea of Jing, while the *yin qiao mai* may be seen as the movement of *jing* through the body, and similar for the *du* and *yang qiao mai* in relation to *shen*. Thus they are reservoirs for each other. Further support is offered by Larre and Rochat de la Vallée (1997, p. 204): “...the *qiao mai* follow the same pattern as the *du mai* and *ren mai* which are circling in a closed circulation. They are just a development of the *du mai* and *ren mai*”.

¹² The Bones may be thought of as the link between pre-heaven (as represented by Marrow/*jing*) and post-heaven (as represented by the tissues—tendons, blood vessels, muscles, and skin).

¹³ For a fuller exploration of the connections between the *dai mai* and Gall Bladder, especially as relates to the Wood element, see (Richardson 2009).

¹⁴ “The Gall Bladder is seen as the link between Post-Natal and Pre-Natal. Which is also the suggestion that some scholars have made within Chinese medicine, that, perhaps, without Eight Extra Channels, how the Chinese try to get into the level of *Jing*, was by working on the Gall Bladder... The idea is that, if you’re going to tap into the Kidney, you tap into the Kidney through Gall Bladder” (Yuen 2005, p. 31).

¹⁵ From this perspective, as long as this process is functioning correctly, the Kidneys should never be deficient, for post-heaven essence will continually replenish the pre-heaven essence—thus if there is Kidney deficiency, its root likely lies in the disruption of this mechanism.

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