The Eight Extraordinary Channels

By Ann Parker, MFHT and FHT accredited course provider

The Eight Extraordinary Channels are an important, fascinating and dynamic part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In Kinesiology, we are familiar with the surface aspects of the Governing and Central Meridian Channels and these two are the only Extraordinary Channels to have their own acupuncture points. The other Six Extraordinary Channels share acu-points, depending on where they flow, with certain points on the Twelve Bilateral Meridians. The Chi (Energy) flows through these Six Extraordinary Channels in an inconsistent, variable pattern. The Eight Extras are the first Energy Channels to emerge after conception and form the blueprint for the growth and development of the physical body. They carry the Yuan Chi – the Pre-Heaven Chi we inherit at the moment of conception. The Extraordinary Channels are known by various names, in Chinese - Qi Jing Ba Mai, in English - the Strange Flows, the Extraordinary Conduits and the Eight Marvellous Ones. The Eight Extraordinary Channels integrate, strengthen, store and regulate the circulation of Chi (Energy) and Blood in the Twelve Regular Bilateral Meridians to maintain a state of balance and harmony. They link all of the Yin and Yang Energy through the fascia of the physical body to nourish and provide Energy to the organs. They are capable of both changing the distribution and quality of Energy used in the body as well as changing the signals that control the use of that Energy.

Why have most kinesiology modalities not been accessing the power of the other Six Extraordinary Channels? Very little information has been published on the Extraordinary Channels in the Chinese texts and it was often contradictory. Acupuncture itself went in and out of fashion in China from around the seventeenth century until around the mid twentieth century. It was, however, continuously practised in Japan. Information on acupuncture first came into the West in the early 1960s as two separate schools of thought (i) the Five Element Theory and (ii) the Eight Extra Acupuncture. Information on The Five Element Theory quickly spread and Dr George Goodheart, the founder of Applied Kinesiology, tapped into this information when explaining the connection between muscle tone and the energy flows. Dr Goodheart is considered the ‘father’ of all the mainstream kinesiology modalities who work with the Twelve Meridians and two of the Extraordinary Channels - Governing and Central Vessels. Most of the research on the Extraordinary Channels seems to have been conducted in Japan, particularly by Yoshio Manaka and started to filter into the west in the 1970s by which time most kinesiology modalities were well established. Yoshio Manaka in collaboration with Kazuko Itaya and Stephen Birch published all his research in ‘Chasing the Dragon’s Tail’ in 1991.
The Four Primary Extraordinary Channels (Penetrating, Central, Governing and Girdle Vessels) play a significant role in regulating the flow of Chi and Blood in the Twelve Bilateral Meridians and their underlying Secondary Channels.

1) The Penetrating Vessel (Chong Mai)
The Chong Mai, the first Energy Channel to flow from the Taiji Pole, is the pillar or central core on which all the other Energy Channels are supported. It is known as the Sea of the Twelve Channels, the Sea of Blood, the Sea of the Five Yin and Six Yang Organs. The Chong Mai links four acupuncture Channels (Spleen, Kidney, Central and Governing) all of which are involved with digestive function, some endocrine functions, menstruation, some neurological functions, and heredity. It connects both the Yin and Yang Chi (Energy) and the Interior with the Exterior. It controls the production of Blood and the flow of Chi and Blood though the Twelve Bilateral Meridians and their Secondary Channels.

2) The Central Vessel (Ren Mai)
The Ren Mai defines the front plane of the body and is the Sea of all the Yin Channels. The Ren Mai originally was translated into English as the Conception Vessel although now it is commonly called the Central Vessel. It activates the Chi in the Three Burners to promote the transformation, transportation and excretion of fluids.

3) The Governing Vessel (Du Mai)
The Du Mai defines the back plane of the body and is the Sea of all the Yang Channels. The Du Mai translates as Governing and refers to a general - someone who controls others. It forms the link between the kidneys and the brain and strengthens the Mind and influences our will power. GV 4, one of the most powerful and important acupuncture points, is the source of the Fire of the Gate of Life.

The Chinese believe that humans provide the connection between heaven and earth. The First Ancestries, – Penetrating Vessel (Chong Mai), Central Vessel (Ren Mai) and the Governing Vessel (Du Mai) provide the connection with the Three Dantians - our own internal reflections of the macrocosmic heaven, humanity and earth. The vertical energy flows from the tips of the fingers stretching up to the heavens and down through the physical body to the feet to connect with the earth – these Energy Channels, in particular, create a flow of Chi between heaven and earth.
4) The Girdle Vessel (Dai Mai)

The Dai Mai is the only Energy Flow that travels horizontally around the body, and it is responsible for binding and connecting all the other Energy Flows – which all flow vertically either up or down. The Dai Mai provides the dynamic structural stability and spherical integration of the Yin and Yang, the body and the spirit and ensures the Chi is contained within the physical body. For humans to be healthy and content there must be a harmonious and balanced flow of Chi flowing through the Three Dantians. One of the Dai Mai’s major functions is to assist this flow by binding and continuously adjusting the vertical Energy Flows. One of the protocols for the Dai Mai in APEC 1 is ‘Regulating the Girdle’. This protocol allows the body to adjust the tension of the Dai Mai because if the tension is too loose the circulation of Chi becomes congested causing stagnation whereas if the tension is too tight the vertical flows become constricted.
The Four Secondary Extraordinary Channels are partners to the Four Primary Extraordinary Channels. Each of the Four Secondary Extraordinary Channels has an inverse relationship with one of the Four Primary Extraordinary Channels through the Master and Control Points.

The Yang and Yin Stepping Vessels (Qiao Mai) start at the heels and travel separately up the body to come together in the neck, eyes and brain. The word, Qiao, conveys the idea of ‘raising the foot to step’, so I prefer to call the Qiao Mai the Stepping Vessels although some Acupuncture schools refer to them as the ‘Heel Vessels’ or ‘Motility Vessels’. They create our stance in the world.

The Yang Stepping Vessel (Yang Qiao Mai) dominates activity, influences the tone of the outer muscles of the leg and brings Yang Chi to the eyes while the Yin Stepping Vessel (Yin Qiao Mai) dominates quietness, influences the tone of the inner muscles of the leg and brings Yin Chi to the eyes.

The Yang and Yin Linking Vessels (Wei Mai) link like a network around the body connecting the flows of the Bilateral Meridians. ‘Linking’ of the Yin and Yang implies facilitating the communication among the Yin and among the Yang Channels respectively to remove obstructions / blockages in the Energy. The term “Wei” means "to connect, make a network, gather other Channels together”. They reinforce and regulate the Bilateral Meridians and absorb excess Chi overflowing from the Bilateral Meridians to help to maintain the balance of the body's Yin and Yang. They link the milestones of our lives and because of this, they relate to the transitions involved in the aging process and the accompanying transformation of the Yin or Yang energies.

The Yang Linking Vessels (Yang Wei Mai) dominate the Chi of the exterior of the whole body circulating and spreading the Defensive Chi in the spaces between the skin and muscles. Energetically, the Yang Wei Mai regulates old habits and patterns and when activated helps the release of these pre-established modes of behaviour that prevent us from changing and evolving. The Yin Linking Vessels (Yin Wei Mai) dominate the Chi of the interior of the whole body and regulates the Chi in the Yin Meridians – Liver, Kidney and Spleen. Distributing nourished Blood and Chi from the Lower and Middle Burners into the Upper Burner the Yin Wei Mai nourishes the heart. Energetically, the Yin Wei Mai are concerned with the meaning that we derive from life and help us to respond to life with clarity and compassion.

To enjoy excellent health and vibrant energy levels we need all these Energy pathways to be functioning optimally in other words working in harmony. The Yin and Yang Energy should always remain in harmony, not just in balance. If the Energy System is both in harmony and balance excess
Chi and Blood building up in the Regular Twelve Bilateral Meridians would be directed to flow into the Eight Extraordinary Channels to be stored for later use. So, in simple terms we could consider the Twelve Regular Bilateral Meridians as rivers of energy and the Extraordinary Channels as reservoirs. The energy system draws from the reservoirs of the Eight Extraordinary Channels to warm the internal organs and irrigate the space between the skin and muscles.

In working with the Eight Extraordinary Channels we are engaging the Essence (Jing) or Genetic Level (DNA), of the client. Because the protocols we have developed for ‘Accessing the Power of the Extraordinary Channels’ tap into the very essence of an individual's humanity and destiny, it is important for us, as practitioners to respect and honour the unique power and transformative potential that can be unleashed in the process. As negative emotional holding patterns are released, blockages in Chi within the Eight Extraordinary Channels return to a normal flow allowing the body to do what it needs to do to return to a state of overall balance and harmony. Working with the Extraordinary Channels allows the release of genetic predispositions thus promoting a better quality of life with enhanced health and increased longevity for our clients.

References:
- ‘The Channels of Acupuncture’ Giovanni Maciocia
- ‘A Manual of Acupuncture’ Peter Deadman & Mazin Al-Khafaji with Kevin Baker
- ‘Chasing the Dragon’s Tail’ Yoshio Manaka with Kazuko Itaya and Stephen Birch

Illustration: The First Ancestries drawn by Michelle Ker, MK Art and Illustration, Sydney

About Ann Parker
Ann Parker, MFHT, BA, MHT, AKFRP, KANZ - an FHT Accredited course provider and experienced Health Kinesiology practitioner and tutor - began researching the role of the Eight Extraordinary Channels in 2010. She became excited about incorporating the in-depth knowledge gained into her existing kinesiology practice and sharing the information with others. Initially Ann and her partner worked with local clients to develop protocols and were delighted with the results of the work. Ann has produced manuals blending theory with practical work to provide courses in APEC (Accessing the Power of the Extraordinary Channels), which are being taught in the UK in June and July.

www(extraordinarychannels.com ann.parker@extraordinarychannels.com