The *Ying* Qi Cycle and the Diurnal Evolutionary Unfoldment of the Extraordinary Vessels

By Thomas Richardson

This article examines the relationship of the *ying* qi cycle to the extraordinary vessels. The *ying* qi cycle reveals the relationship of the extraordinary vessels to the evolution of consciousness, from the source, breaking into yin and yang, and creating the rest of manifestation. The *ying* qi cycle allows us to deepen our connection to the source and achieve greater integration within ourselves and with everything else manifest at the level of humanity.

The *ying* qi cycle begins by accessing the extraordinary vessels that originate in the lower dantian—the ren, chong, and *du mai*—which correspond to the quiescent state, the deep, interior reservoir from which all life springs forth. The dynamic yin and yang are mobilized when the *qiao mai* are accessed. The *yin wei mai* integrate the interior, allowing us to extend and connect within and without, as represented by the opening of the *yang wei mai*. Finally, everything is brought together and regulated by the *dai mai*, which facilitates the return to the source to start the cycle again the next day. This cycle of qi through the extraordinary vessels reflects the evolution of consciousness—everything originates with the source and then divides into yin and yang, which give birth to the 10,000 things present at the level of humanity, eventually returning to a state of oneness.

The *ying* qi flows through the horary cycle every 24 hours, harmonizing the body with the cycle of the sun and the surrounding universe. The body is a microcosm—just as every day is a new birth, and every night a death, the *ying* qi flows through the twelve channels, activating the extraordinary vessels in a particular order. We are born each day, formed from the source, integrated within ourselves, and connected to the surrounding environment in a dynamic balance. The *ying* qi cycle allows us to continuously achieve a greater connection to source, integration within ourselves, and connection to our environment.

The *Ying* Qi Flow

The *ying* qi flows through the twelve primary channels, corresponding with the horary clock and the cycles of day and night. As *ying* qi flows through the channels, it follows the cycle of birth, transformation, and death, as the sun is born each morning and dies each night. As *ying* qi flows through the channels, it activates the points it flows through, gradually opening the body and allowing for the integration of body and spirit, enhancing awareness, self-realization, and connection between above and below, and inside and outside.

When I first began learning the channels and points, I practiced feeling the flow of *ying* qi through the channels as it activated each point and opened the channel. One night, out on a run, I began to run through the channels again, something I had not done in quite awhile. As I traveled down the Lung channel, I reached LU-7 (*lieque, Broken Sequence*). Thinking to myself, “Confluent point of the *ren,*” suddenly I felt the *ren mai* light up. I began to wonder how and in what order the extraordinary vessels would open as I continued to flow through the channels. I found that the order in which the confluent points of the extraordinary vessels are accessed suggests an underlying coherency and structure in the nature of the vessels themselves, and in their relation to the primary channels and the evolution of consciousness.

The Quiescent State

We begin our journey through the channels with the Lung Channel of Hand Taiyin. The Lung meridian begins the cycle of *ying* qi through the twelve channels and corresponds to 3-5am, the pre-dawn of a new day. Starting in the middle jiao and emerging at LU-1 (*zhongfu, Middle Palace*), the qi flows through the meridian and reaches LU-7, the confluent point of the *ren mai*. Continuing, the qi travels up the Large Intestine channel to the nose, then moves into the Stomach channel and flows all the way down to the feet, crossing over into the Spleen channel. As it starts flowing up the Spleen channel, we come to SP-4 (*gongsun, Grandfather Grandson*), confluent point of the *chong mai*. From the Spleen channel the qi flows into the Heart channel until reaching the Small Intestine channel and the confluent point of the *du mai*, SI-3 (*houxi, Back Stream*), completing the first half of the cycle—the first six primary channels corresponding to the horary cycle from 3am to 3pm, and the opening of the first three extraordinary vessels—the *ren, chong,* and *du mai*. These three vessels are all said to start in the lower dantian, and to be three branches of one vessel. Thus, they correspond to the source, the undifferentiated oneness, as it begins to form into yin and yang in the microcosm of the human body. These three vessels may be referred to as the quiescent state, the interior reservoir from which all life springs forth.

The *ren* and *du mai* correspond to the polarity of yin and yang in the channel system, with the *chong mai* connecting them. As noted by Kiiko Matsumoto and Stephen Birch, Li Shi Zhen stated: “The *ren mai* and *du mai* make contact together at the *chong mai.*” Matsumoto and Birch go on to say, “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.”

When the oneness splits into two, it creates a polarity. But even though there is a distinction between yin and yang, they are always part of one integrated whole—something simultaneously connects and separates them. Just as humanity is found between heaven and earth, the *chong mai* is found between the *ren* and *du mai*. Tibetan medicine and Daoist texts discuss a branch of the *chong mai* (sometimes referred to as the pre-heaven *chong mai*) that runs straight through the center of the body, from REN-1 (*huiyin, Meeting of Yin*) to DU-20 (*baihui, Hundred Meetings*), connecting the three *dantian* and anterior/posterior, heaven.

All the other extraordinary vessels are created from this original division of the oneness into yin and yang, and the *chong mai* connection between them. Li Shi Zhen wrote, “The extraordinary vessels are the root of the Great Avenue of Pre-Heaven, the Governing, Directing and Penetrating Vessels [Du-REN-Chong Mai] are the Source of Creation.”

Figure 1: The quiescent state
The Second Half of the Horary Cycle: Movement, Manifestation, and Integration

In the second half of the cycle, the ying qi enters the Urinary Bladder channel and the second six primary channels, corresponding to the time period from 3pm to 3am. Along the Urinary Bladder channel, we come to BL-62 (shenmai, Extending Vessel), the confluent point of the yang qiao mai, the Yang Motility vessel, and move from the quiescent state into the dynamic phase of movement and manifestation. BL-62 is coupled with SI-3, confluent point of the du mai, the Sea of Yang. The dynamic yang arises out of the quiescent yang. The yang qiao mai arises from the du mai. The du mai is the yin within yang of the two channels, pertaining to the deep, interior, quiescent state of yang, and the yang qiao mai is the yang within yang, pertaining to the relatively more exterior, active state of yang within the body.

The ying qi then flows into the Kidney channel and reaches KID-6 (zhaochai, Shining Sea), the confluent point of the yin qiao mai, or Yin Motility vessel. KID-6 is paired with LU-7, the confluent point of the ren mai. The dynamic yin arises from the quiescent yin. The ren mai pertains to the yin within yin of the two coupled channels, the interior, quiescent state of yin, and the yin qiao mai pertains to the yang within yin, the relatively more exterior, dynamic state of yin.

In basic Chinese physiology, essence must first transform into yin and yang to nourish and sustain the function and structure of the human being. In the daily cycle of the extraordinary vessels, this mobilization of yin and yang corresponds to the opening of the qiao mai. At this point in the cycle, yin and yang are moving, circulating, and manifesting, creating the energetic polarity of body and spirit (jing and shen) throughout the body.

The ying qi flows through the rest of the Kidney channel and into the Pericardium channel, to the yin wei mai confluent point, P-6 (neiguan, Inner Gate). P-6 is coupled with SP-4, confluent point of the chong mai. Just as the yin and yang qiao mai arise from the quiescent yang and yin of the du and ren mai, the yin wei mai appears to arise from the chong mai. It is the polarity between the yin and yang qiao mai that mirrors the chong mai polarity between the ren and du mai. In activating the Yin Linking vessel, the dynamic polarity of the yin and yang qiao mai are integrated, integrating the interior. It may be at this point of the evolutionary cycle that one is able to experience self-realization as the yin wei mai engenders integration within oneself.

**Figure 2: Manifestation and self-realization**

After activating the yin wei mai and integrating the interior, the ying qi flows into the San jiao channel to SJ 5 (waiguan, Outer Pass), where it accesses the yang wei mai, the Yang/Exterior Linking vessel. The yang wei mai may be seen as the energetic matrix of the body's external energy field, suggesting that only after internal integration can we connect to the exterior, integrate the inside and the outside, and connect with everything else. This connecting of the yang, a weaving together of the external energetic matrix, is rooted in and arises from the yin, the internal integration of body and spirit within the microcosm of the human body. As noted by Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée, referencing the work of Zhang Zizong, "This commentator also said that as the qi of yin and yang qiao are joined together, the exterior and interior are in an exchange and relationship and penetrate each other." This may be read as suggesting that only after the joining and integration of the qiao mai (which, in this model, relates to the activation and function of the yin wei mai) does the yang wei mai opens to the exterior and the {mais are able to connect with each other and allow interpretation of the inside and the outside. Comparing the qiao and wei mai, Larre and Rochat write, "With the qiao the main idea was putting in motion, and rising up from the earth, with a community of qi within the yin and yang qiao mai, a perpetual compensation. Here with the wei mai we have rather the way to maintain the order because the yin and yang, and all kinds of yin and all kinds of yang in the body are maintained in a good proportion in order to compose an harmonious unity.""

The Return to Quiescence

As we near the end of our journey, the qi flows into the Gall Bladder channel to GB-41 (zulinqi, Foot Governor of Tears), confluent point of the dai mai, or Belt/Girdling Vessel. Activating the dai mai, one reaches a state of wholeness. The dai mai brings us full circle, completing the cycle and bringing us back to the quiescent state. The dai mai binds all the meridians and the external energy field, and guides the qi back to the source.10

If the yang wei mai is the energetic matrix of the energy field that can flex and expand in relation to oneself and one's environment, the dai mai may be seen as regulating how much it expands or contracts.11 The dai mai binds the ren, chong, and du mai at the level of the lower dantian and brings us full circle, back to the beginning. As noted by Jeffrey Yuen, the "...Dai Mai is often referred to as the Meridian that maintains the integrity of the First Ancestries, that returns the integrity: the Chong in the middle, the Ren in the front, and the Du in the back."12

The dai mai, although activated at the end of the horary cycle, relates to the beginning. The four nuclear extraordinary vessels—ren, chong, du, and dai mai—relate to the quiescent state, and they are paired with the four peripheral extraordinary vessels, the qiao and wei mai, which relate to activity and expansion from the source outwards. The chong and dai mai make a perfect yin-yang pair—the chong mai connects anterior and posterior heaven (ren and du mai), while the dai mai wraps around the outside and contains them. The chong mai, as the polarity between the ren and the du mai, links the quiescent and dynamic state, while the dai mai links the dynamic state back to the quiescent state. The dai mai renders the yin and yang aspects of being (above and below, inside and outside) into a unified whole and allows one to start the cycle again the next day.

*Continued on page 27"
Providing Safe Solutions for Pediatric Care

- Eleven Pediatric Formulas
- Mild Tasting, Lower Alcohol Content
- Easy to Swallow, Easy to Digest
- Safe and Effective

For more information
www.acudetox.com—the website of the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association to set up a training in acudetox in your area and further information.
www.carasac.org—the website for Community Addiction Recovery Association (CARA).
www.allianceforaddictionsolutions.org—the website for an international networking organization of people committed to pharmaceutical-free methods of treating addiction and mental health disorders.

SleepMix Tea—used in many acudetox settings to relax clients and promote sleep. Contains peppermint, catnip, camomile, yarrow, hops, and skullcap. 1000 teabags cost $72 plus $6 shipping from NutraControl. Richard.roberts@mindspring.com, 212-929-3780.

Carolyn Reuben directs Community Addiction Recovery Association (CARA), a Sacramento nonprofit using acupuncture, nutrition, and other mind-body techniques for addictive and mental health disorders. She is a licensed acupuncturist and author of four self-help health books. Carolyn has performed acudetox since 1992, and in 1999 was given the Harold Cole Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse by the Sacramento County Alcohol and Drug Advisory Board. She can be reached at carolynreuben@carasac.org, 916-485-2272, www.carasac.org.
Figure 3: Connecting the interior and exterior and returning to the source

References

2. It is of note that taiji is sometimes translated as "Supreme Polarity."


4. It is perhaps for this reason that the chong mai is called the Sea of Blood, the Sea of the 12 channels, and the Sea of the zonglu. The chong mai is a manifestation of the interplay of the deepest yin and yang, and it is this fundamental polarity of yin and yang that gives rise to everything throughout the body, just as it is the polarity of Heaven and Earth in the macrocosm of the universe that gives rise to the 10,000 things.


6. «...the qiao mai follow the same pattern as the du mai and ren mai...They are just a development of the du mai and ren mai." Larre C, Rochat de la Vallée E. The Eight Extraordinary Meridians. Cambridge: Monkey Press; 1997/204. Transcribed and edited by Sandra Hill.

7. The relation of the qiao mai to this transformation may also be inferred from the literature: "The commentators of the Nanjing 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." Ibid., p. 174.

8. Ibid., p. 182.

9. Ibid., p. 212.


11. "Dai mai is not only a circle but the expression of the volume of the body...The dai mai comes from within, and expands, giving an expansion of volume, and also a limit to this expansion." Larre, op. cit., p. 154.


Thomas Richardson lives in Austin, Texas, where he studies Oriental medicine and Western herbalism. For the last three years, he has studied pulse diagnosis under Will Morris, PhD, DAOM, LAc. Thomas is available to teach seminars on Neoclassical Pulse Diagnosis and Extraordinary Chinese Medicine, and can be contacted at tomas-richardson@hotmail.com.