

## The Luo Vessels (Part 3)

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The Luo Vessels are the most humanistic of the acupuncture channels. They are conduits of Ying Qi: blood and fluids — the mediumship for the Shen-spirit and the mind. Ying is the level of interaction, communication and connection. It is also the level of learning, conscious awareness and self-cultivation.

The Luo Vessels are pathological channels: they deal chiefly with the problems we encounter throughout our daily lives. They are not instinctual Wei qi level channels like the Sinews, which deal with instinctual moment-to-moment stimuli. The Luo Vessels relate to feelings; the ways in which we define ourselves; the stories we create about the world and our place in it.

### The Psycho-Social Element

Clinically, when we want to directly address a problem in our lives, especially when it has an emotional or psycho-social element to it, the Luo Vessels are best. The Luo can be looked at in two major ways: both of which are detailed in Chapter 10 of the Ling Shu.

They can be organized in the same way as the Primary Channels, seen as a collateral system that emerge from the "main" channels and therefore progress in the same way. The other way the Luo are sequenced are as their own distinct channel system, not following the sequence of the Primary Channels, but rather anatomically: from the chest to the shoulders, head, legs and abdomen.

The Primary Channels begin with the Lungs and end with the Liver. When viewed as a progression of psycho-social development, the Luo as collaterals of the Primary Channels, expressing our difficulties, showcase how a person functions and dysfunctions within their emotional, mental and social selves.

The beginning of the Primary Channel sequence (Lungs, Large Intestine, Stomach and Spleen) show how a person discovers themselves, and the difficulties they can encounter during this process. The end of the sequence on the other hand show how a person can lose themselves: the Pericardium, Triple Heater, Gallbladder and Liver.

### Relating to the World

After the initial stages of discovering the world, we enter into a dialogue between ourselves and the world; a type of feedback process through the Heart, Small Intestine, Bladder and Kidney. We discover who we are and how we relate to the world. During the last stage we decide what we will do with who we are. This is the stage where we either accept ourselves and our place in the world or reject it.

Preceding the Pericardium Luo Vessel that of the Kidney which manifests symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder and paranoia when the vessel is in a state of "fullness" and "emptiness." The Pericardium Luo Vessel, when it manifests in a state of "fullness," taking on stress from its Primary Channel, creates symptoms where a person is unable to control their emotions. When the vessel

becomes "empty," the person will become unable to interact: a type of "schizoid" personality disorder.

Both the Kidney and Pericardium Luo Vessels manifest a type of overwhelm, which begins in the prior channel: the Bladder Luo which controls a person's threshold for stimuli and behavior. When the Bladder Luo is "full" it will create a type of anxious hyper-sensitive panic disorder, where everything is perceived as a crisis. When the Bladder Luo "empties" the person loses self-control, no longer knowing when they've hit their limit. These people can overdo behaviors and indulgences simply because they've lost their capacity to know when enough is enough.

Prior to the Bladder is the Small Intestine Luo which involves reaction to criticism. "Fullness" in the Small Intestine Luo will create intolerance to criticism, whereas "emptiness" manifests an obsessive sense of insecurity.

### The Hyper State & Burnout

A common feature of the Luo Vessels are states of hyper-sensitivity or hyper-active expressiveness followed by a type of burn-out. The Bladder "fullness" makes a person overly sensitive and nervous; an "empty" Bladder Luo causes a person to lack awareness of that which may be dangerous to them, so they never know when to stop drinking, working, exercising, eating etc. The Small Intestine "fullness" causes a person to be defensive and fighting; the "empty" Small Intestine causes a person to not know how to process feedback: is it a criticism, or praise? What do they even mean?

When the sequence gets to the level of Pericardium, Triple Heater, Gallbladder and Liver their Luo Vessels show a retreat from the world. The Pericardium causes a person to become unable or unwilling to interact: it's just too confusing, overwhelming and painful. The Triple Heater's Luo manifests in a state of stubborn rigidity: the person can only do things their way, the way they know. When the Triple Heater becomes "empty," the person stops caring altogether. It's not that they have an aversion to interaction, they just lose interest. They become indifferent to the feelings of others.

### Feelings of Melancholy

The Gallbladder's Luo is the stage where a person becomes isolated and depressed. There's a sense of futility and defeat. The Liver's Luo brings a person into preferring their fantasy world. They begin to create alternate personalities and realities to live in because their own is either too painful, overwhelming or disappointing.

After the Liver's Luo the next vessel in the sequence is the Great Luo of the Spleen which represents a state of unbearable suffering which eventually breaks down the body and mind. This is followed by the Luo vessels for Yin and Yang, debated as being points along the Ren and Du channels or the Qiao Vessels.

These channels represent the accumulation of Karma. Within classical Chinese medical philosophy there's a belief that whatever we reject or cannot fully embrace and/or work out in this life becomes part of our next incarnation, either through our offspring or through reincarnation.

### The Triple Heater Luo

I remember when I first learned the psycho-social theory of the Luo Vessels. I thought the symptoms and states sounded very extreme and dramatic. However in practice and self-observation I realize they are the minutiae of our daily mental-emotional lives. One need not be a

schizophrenic to have an issue relating to the Liver's Luo. A tendency to indulge in fantasy is enough.

One need not be a sociopath to have an issue relating to the Triple Heater's Luo. There are degrees of severity. However even the slightest issue relating to the Liver's Luo can indicate problems in accepting oneself. After the Liver, pathology passes through the Great Luo into the Qiao Vessels which philosophically relate to difficulty accepting oneself and the world.

Even the mildest "fullness" in the Luo Vessels can create suffering and difficulty in a person's psycho-social life. This is why treatment of the Luo can often bring about a sense of tremendous relief therapeutically. "Emptiness" when treated can empower a person, helping them feel they again have the energy and willpower to face the difficulties of their lives.

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