

# Using the Secondary Vessels to Explore the Mysterious Self

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Healing can be a tumultuous journey, with many ups and downs. More than just relieving symptoms, often our task as healers is guiding and supporting our patients through difficulties within the healing process.

The power in working with the deepest acupuncture channels, the extraordinary vessels and divergent channels, is the ability to reach into the *yuan* source (constitutional) level of the body to pull out latent or repressed pathology.

## Working With the *Yuan*

Working with the *yuan* level can be physically and mentally trying, sometimes even dispiriting for the patient. While clearing latent material, patients sometimes become sicker or more troubled for a period of time before they begin to feel better. They may want to stop treatment or abandon the journey altogether. This can be the time when treatment becomes most tricky for both patient and practitioner.

The *yuan* level can be like going into the "shadowlands" of the unconscious: a type of shamanic journey. Not every patient is ready for this; and not every practitioner is suited or interested in providing this level of care for their patients. But if patient and practitioner are both ready and willing to explore the mysteries of *yuan* level, they should have an arsenal of tools to use when needed.

Use of the extraordinary vessels was clinically forbidden until relatively late in the classical era, for many reasons. Some said it was immoral to try to intervene with a person's constitutional nature. Others said it was too difficult or even impossible to reach this level of energetics within a person.

Regardless, there remains the challenge in working with the channels that conduct this energy. Use of the extraordinary vessels and divergent channels can cause healing disturbances in the form of physical "healing crises," psychological disturbance and detoxification symptoms, some of which can be very uncomfortable and even frightening.

## The Role of Sinew and *Luo*

Jeffrey Yuen taught that the more superficial "collateral" systems (the sinew channels and *luo* vessels) can help a patient with passage through *yuan*-level issues when utilizing the extraordinary vessels and divergent channels. In many cases, these collateral systems are added to *yuan*-level treatments. The *jing* well points are often added to divergent channel treatments to help vent (wind) pathology that has been pulled from the depths of the *yuan* level to the superficial *wei* level of the body. The *jing* well points activate the sinew channels to utilize *wei* "defensive" *qi* to quickly and strongly release pathology from the body.

The "opening" or "confluent" points of the extraordinary vessels, most of which are *luo* points, suggest that the *luo* vessels and their ability to conduct *ying* "nourishing" *qi* act in much the same way as the sinews do for the divergents. There is a theory that the "*luo* gives access to the source (*yuan*).\" But the *luo* can also be seen as an outlet for that which comes out of the source when working with the extraordinary vessels clinically.

### Levels of Consciousness

Understanding the level of consciousness within the different energetic levels of the body is necessary when working with the secondary vessels. The *yuan* is the level of one's nature: it has an instinctual "being-ness" to it. *Ying* is the level of the emotions and the conscious mind at which experiences can be processed. The *wei* is also instinctual, but in a more active "moment to moment" way. It is the level at which things can be most fully and quickly released.

The *qiao* vessels are described in the *Nan Jing* as the great depositories for the *luo* vessels. Jeffrey Yuen teaches that philosophically, the *qiao* vessels impact our "stance" - both physically in terms of posture, but also psychologically in terms of how we relate to ourselves (*yin*) and the world (*yang*).

When exploring and freeing a patient's *qiao* vessels, issues may arise. Wind can be released, in the form of muscular, dermatological, neurological or sensory issues, as well as mental or emotional distress. These vessels challenge a person to come face to face with themselves and their relationships within the present moment.

This is arguably the reason why the acupuncture point GB 20 (*Feng Chi*, "The Wind Pool") is designated as the final point on both the *yin* and *yang qiao* vessels, suggesting that wind can often be released when working with these channels and must therefore be dealt with.

### Combining *Luo* and *Qiao*

I've found the *luo* vessels are particularly helpful in dealing with issues that arise when working with the *qiao* vessels. For example, the *yin qiao* vessel classically deals with the relationship to oneself, and can treat addictions, self-hatred, self-abuse, feelings of inferiority, and fear of oneself. Use of *yin qiao* is like stirring the pot from its depths, waiting to see what emerges.

The *luo* vessels can be used to work out the specifics of what arises from *qiao* vessel treatments: "to move the blood (consciousness) to expel wind (healing crisis)." For example, feelings of betrayal classically relate to the heart's *luo* vessel; sexual addictions and tendencies to fantasize excessively to the liver's *luo* vessel; paranoia to the kidney's *luo*; inability to handle feedback to the small intestine's *luo*; and indifference and rigidity to the triple heater.

### Clinical Pearls

We never know what is hidden in the source. If something is being kept in latency within the *yuan* level, it is hidden. We only gain awareness of this material as it begins to be released through treatment. Then it is our task as healers and guides to help the patient work out these issues; either by releasing wind that has emerged, or helping them transform phlegm or blood stasis that becomes visible.

Diagnosis within the *yuan* level is tricky. We don't always know what we are dealing with when working with this level of energetics. Therefore, after probing and exploring the *yuan* level, pathology and issues that were hidden can be released. Things may emerge for the patient that they are not prepared for.

We as practitioners must therefore be ready for anything when working with *yuan*-level acupuncture channels. The sinew channels and *luo* vessels become our main arsenal of tools to deal with that which emerges.

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