



CHINESE & ASIAN MEDICINE

## Extraordinary Circumstances: Cultivating Relationships With *Chong Mai*

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### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- The primary channels (*jing*) are what most of us study and use chiefly in practice. The collaterals (*luo*) are less often utilized.
- Some of our patients require a deeper level of intervention than is reachable via the primary channels.
- *Chong mai* is the deepest of all the extraordinary vessels. A *chong mai* pulse indicates the person is struggling with something fundamental, foundational in their lives.

Treating the *shen*-spirit is challenging. It goes beyond the role of “doctor” and begins to enter the realm of “shaman” or “priest”; roles many of us are unprepared to take on. But at some point we may find ourselves ready for pathways to cultivate this aspect of ourselves.

#### Channels and Collaterals

As acupuncturists, the channels and collaterals (*jing luo*) are the major tools used to treat our patients. The primary channels (*jing*) are what most of us study and use chiefly in practice. The collaterals (*luo*) are less often utilized.

I recall a teacher describing the difference between the channels and collaterals. The channels (*jing*) are the pathways of our lives, the main paths, the normal flow: the physiology. The *luo* are the distractions or challenges we encounter that take us off course, disrupting the smooth flow of our lives.

The *Nei Jing* says the *luo* manifest states of inflammation, rebellious *qi*, pain, blood stagnation and *shen* disturbance. They are a holding place for unresolved pathology. They hold onto the

discomforts of our lives, creating symptoms of dis-ease. Rebellious *qi* is a key symptom: signs the normal flow of our lives have been disrupted; while *shen* disturbance shows a lack of harmony.

The *Nan Jing* introduces the extraordinary vessels as “reservoirs” and “ditches” for the primary channels. This makes the extraordinary vessels unique. They act as both channels and collaterals, showing their special importance.

Some of our patients require a deeper level of intervention than is reachable via the primary channels. They require us to take on the role of shaman as well as doctor, to deal with the existential concerns of life.

Chapter 27 of the *Nan Jing* creates an image that the extraordinary vessels were tools utilized by “the sages of antiquity” for “extraordinary situations.” They are the tools to be used for the *jing shen*: essence-spirit relationship - the most challenging events in life.

### Pulse and *Chong Mai*

Pulse is the major method for diagnosis in Chinese medicine. When we are assessing the type of stress experienced by our patients, understanding the extraordinary pulses can help us determine the level of intervention required.

Li Shi Zhen writes in his *Classic on Pulse Diagnosis*; “*Chong Mai* diseases are evident when the three pulse positions are firm and uninterrupted. Usually the pulse is also wiry and full.”

*Chong mai* is the deepest of all the extraordinary vessels. A teacher of mine called it “the blueprint” of the body, which gives birth to all other channels in the body.

The way to distinguish a “*chong mai* pulse” is by finding a quality that extends through all three pulse positions, from the *cun*, through the *guan*, into the *chi*, creating what seems a continuous pulse that, as Zhen writes, is usually wiry and often full. This is found in the middle level of the pulse.

A uniformity in all three positions in the deep level of the pulse relates to *ren mai*, while the superficial level of the pulse relates to *du mai*. The center relates to *chong mai*.

A *chong mai* pulse indicates an issue deeper than that of the primary channels. Something within the person’s constitution is being stressed or stirred up, demanding attention.

### The Many Roles and Trajectories of *Chong Mai*

There are many ways to think about *chong mai*. It has many roles, just as it has many trajectories. It is the “sea of blood.” It is also the “great *luo* of *shao yin*.”

*Chong mai* is the basis of heart-kidney communication. Stagnation within *chong mai* can relate to this: the *jing shen*. Much of the main trajectory of *chong* flows through kidney points on the abdomen and chest to fulfill this function.

*Chong* is also the sea of blood, beginning at the region of the uterus. It is a channel of fertility and creation, not only for a fetus, but also for our lives: development of the self as it gives birth to the “sea of *yin*” (*ren mai*) and the “sea of *yang*” (*du mai*) - bonding and self-determination.

*Chong* “emerges” as a channel from the point ST 30 (*Qi Chong*), the *shu*-transport point for the “sea of food and drink.” This designates *chong* as the foundation for digestion and assimilation: the *qi* for transformative metabolism.

From ST 30 the trajectory flows into the kidney points of the abdomen, many of which “regulate *chong* and *ren*,” as well as utilize kidney *qi* to support spleen and stomach *qi*.

Once *chong* reaches the chest, it travels through the “kidney” *shu*-transport points impacting the internal organs, especially their *shen* aspects. This is mirrored on the back on the bladder channel.

### Clinical Applications

Points that regulate *chong* and *ren* are useful and interesting clinically. Acupuncture points can illuminate much about the role and functions of a channel.

In TCM, regulation of *chong* and *ren* is usually seen as relating to menstruation and fertility. However, in classical acupuncture the view is more expansive.

As an extraordinary vessel, *chong* relates to the matrix of the body, but also the *ming*, or destiny: the basic “thrust” in life.

*Chong* is the foundational pathway: the way our (kidney) *jing*-essence communicates and expresses itself through the (heart) *shen* to fulfill our *ming* (destiny). It is the way we express and create our lives, which is carried out by the spleen-stomach and its metabolic creative process. *Chong* is the blueprint from which we build our lives, and direct our spirit and will into action and manifestation.

A *chong mai* pulse indicates the person is struggling with something fundamental, foundational in their lives; something with great meaning, such as identity or sense of direction: the way they are (or are not) dealing with their destiny and relationship between themselves (kidneys), the social world (spleen) and their spirit animation (heart). It can be an issue of *qi* (action/doing) or blood (feeling/being), but more likely the problem involves “harmonization” between doing and being.

ST 30 (*Qi Chong*), the place where the *qi* of *chong* emerges, is a famous point that “harmonizes *qi* and blood,” setting the theme for *chong mai*. The *Ling Shu* describes *shen* as a state of harmonization between *qi* and blood, the internal organs and their spirit aspects. Arguably, this is the chief role of *chong mai* in all its manifestations: harmonization as the method for cultivating *shen*.

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