

ACUPUNCTURE CHANNELS AND POINTS

Introduction to Channels

“It is by virtue of the twelve channels that human life exists, that disease arises, that human beings can be treated and illness cured. The twelve channels are where beginners start and masters end. To beginners it seems easy; the masters know how difficult it is.”

Nei Jing Ling Shu Chapter 17

History of the Channel Theory

There are two broad theories regarding how channel theory developed:

- **Points First; Channels Second**
Tender spots were observed during the course of disease. Stimulating these points led to an alleviation of symptoms. Eventually, these points were grouped together into channels.
- **Channels First; Points Second**
Channels were mapped out by sensation propagation during massage and Qi Gong. Later, points were discovered along these channels that affected qi flow.

The discovery of silk scrolls in Ma Wang-Dui points to the second theory. These scrolls (dated 168 BCE) describe channel pathways but not points.

Regardless, by 200 AD, all the channels and 349 points had been plotted, meaning the theory of the channels and points is at least 2000 years old.

Introduction to Channels

经络

jīng luò

“channel”
“path”
“track”
“route”

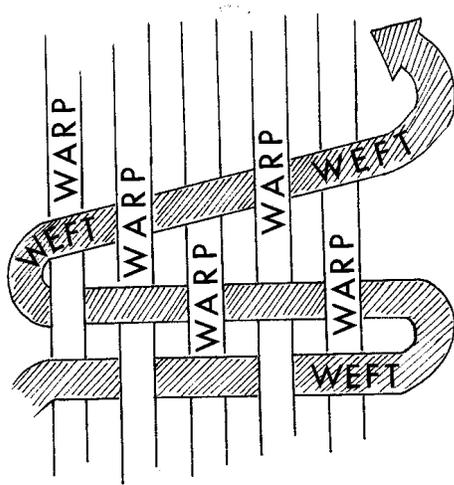
*the vertical or
north-south pathways*

“enmesh”
“web”
“net”
“network”

*the horizontal or
east-west pathways*

Jing-Luo is the collective term for the “channel network” of the body.

The Jing-Luo



Classical texts also use water systems as a representation of the channel system, e.g. reservoirs, irrigation ditches, streams, and tributaries.

Modern practitioners sometimes think of meridian systems, with the Jing being vertical lines of longitude and Luo being horizontal lines of latitude.

In weaving, the **warp** are the threads extended lengthwise across the loom. They are usually twisted tighter and form the structure.

The **weft** or **woof** are the threads that cross side-to-side to fill in the structure.

Similarly, in the body:

- **Jing (main channels)** have a vertical, north-south orientation.
- **Luo (connecting channels)** have a horizontal, east-west orientation

Naming the 12 Channels

In Chinese, the primary channels are named according to:

1. The limb through which it travels (hand or foot)
2. Its yin or yang nature
3. Its “depth” according to the six levels

太阳	tài yáng	greater yang supreme yang
少阳	shǎo yáng	lesser yang
阳明	yáng míng	yang brightness
太阴	tài yīn	greater yin supreme yin
少阴	shǎo yīn	lesser yin
厥阴	jué yīn	terminal yin absolute yin/reverting yin

(6 levels) x (2 limbs) = 12 channels

Naming the 12 Channels

Hand	Tai Yang	Small Intestine
Foot		Urinary Bladder
Hand	Shao Yang	San Jiao
Foot		Gall Bladder
Hand	Yang Ming	Large Intestine
Foot		Stomach
Hand	Tai Yin	Lung
Foot		Spleen
Hand	Shao Yin	Heart
Foot		Kidney
Hand	Jue Yin	Pericardium
Foot		Liver

Depth of the Six Levels

Tai Yang	<i>opens to the outside</i>
Shao Yang	<i>yang pivot</i>
Yang Ming	<i>unites to the inside</i>
Tai Yin	<i>opens to the outside</i>
Shao Yin	<i>yin pivot</i>
Jue Yin	<i>unites to the inside</i>

Channel Pairs

This naming system gives us two ways of pairing channels:

1. Yin-Yang Pairs (a.k.a Interiorly-Exteriorly Related Channels)

Each channel is paired with its yin/yang counterpart of the same element. Each member of the pair is on the same extremity.

Example: *The Spleen Channel has an interior-exterior relationship with the Stomach Channel. Both channels are on the leg.*

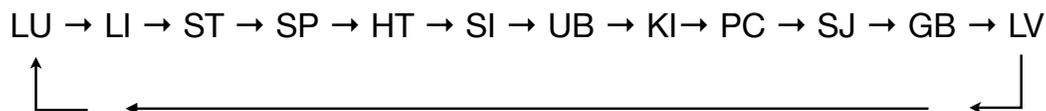
2. Six-Level Channel Pairs

Each channel is paired with another channel of the same level. Each member of the pair has the same yin/yang polarity but is on the opposite extremities.

Example: *The Spleen Channel has a Six-Level pairing with the Lung Channel (Tai Yin pair). They are both yin channels. One channel is on the leg, and the other channel is on the arm.*

Flow of Qi in the 12 Channels

Qi flows through the 12 primary channels in a continuous circuit:



When a normal person exhales once, the contents of the channels proceed three inches; when a normal person inhales once, the contents of the channels proceed another three inches. Exhaling and inhaling constitute one breathing period. During this period the contents of the channels proceed six inches.

A person, in the course of one day and one night, breathes altogether 13,500 times. During that time, the contents of the channels proceed through 50 passages. That is, they circulate through the body in the period needed by the clepsydra's dripping water to move down by 100 markings. The ying qi and wei qi proceed through 25 passages during a yang period, and they proceed through 25 passages during a yin period. This constitutes one cycle.

Nan Jing, Chapter 1 (translated by Paul Unschuld)

Circadian Flow of Qi

Hand Tai Yin	LU	3:00 - 5:00 AM
Hand Yang Ming	LI	5:00 - 7:00 AM
Foot Yang Ming	ST	7:00 - 9:00 AM
Foot Tai Yin	SP	9:00 - 11:00 AM
Hand Shao Yin	HT	11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Hand Tai Yang	SI	1:00 - 3:00 PM
Foot Tai Yang	UB	3:00 - 5:00 PM
Foot Shao Yin	KI	5:00 - 7:00 PM
Hand Jue Yin	PC	7:00 - 9:00 PM
Hand Shao Yang	SJ	9:00 - 11:00 PM
Foot Shao Yang	GB	11:00 PM - 1:00 AM
Foot Jue Yin	LV	1:00 - 3:00 AM

Channels that are opposite each other on the clock are called midday-midnight pairs.

Example: *The HT and GB channels are midday-midnight pairs.*

Order of Channel Flow



Pathways of the Channels

The 12 primary channels flow into one another on the body in the following way:

Chest → Hand → Face → Foot → Chest

Alternately, we could say that a complete circuit consists of four pathways:

1. Chest → Hand
2. Hand → Face
3. Face → Foot
4. Foot → Chest

Yin channels travel along the inner surface of the arm or leg.

Yang channels travel along the outer surface of the arm or leg.

These 4 pathways are repeated 3 times, giving us the circuit of the 12 channels.

Pathways of the Channels

LU	Chest → Hand
LI	Hand → Face
ST	Face → Foot
SP	Foot → Chest
HT	Chest → Hand
SI	Hand → Face
UB	Face → Foot
KI	Foot → Chest
PC	Chest → Hand
SJ	Hand → Face
GB	Face → Foot
LV	Foot → Chest

General Functions of the Channels

1. Connect, link, balance, harmonize, and render the body an integrated whole
 - connect internal organs with the exterior
 - connect internal organs with each other
 - connect different parts of the exterior
 - connect upper and lower parts of the body
 - connect left and right half of the body
 - balance and harmonize yin and yang in the various parts of the body
2. Circulate qi and blood to nourish the body
 - provide nourishment to all parts of the body
3. Protect the body
 - prevent external pathogens from entering deeper into the body
4. Respond to dysfunction in the body
 - transmit pathogenic qi along the course of the channel leading to additional symptoms
 - demonstrate disease of the channel or corresponding organ through tenderness, discoloration, or temperature
5. Transmit qi to the diseased area

The Secondary Channels

