

## Characteristics of the 8 Qi Mai

- An older system than the 12 meridians
- Does not contain points
  - Exceptions: Ren Mai and Du Mai
- Flows upward
- Does not connect directly with the organs
- Intersects the main meridians
- Provides an alternative view of energetic depth
- Divides, connects and defines the body along cardinal planes
- Provides a deep reservoir for qi and blood
- Allows access to a cross section of indications and body regions with the needling of a single master point

The Eight Extraordinary vessels may well be the oldest body energetic system. However, unlike the Luo vessels, it would be a mistake to call them the oldest acupuncture channels. Their original use was most likely as channels for Taoist alchemy where qi, jing and shen were circulated by meditative intention for the purpose of self cultivation. By the time of the Han dynasty, the use of the Eight vessels for disease prevention purposes began to be integrated into the developing channel complex.

Unlike other channels, the Eight Extraordinary vessels do not all contain acupuncture points that are unique to themselves. In fact, only two of the vessels, the Ren Mai and Du Mai, contain their own points. The other vessels share points with the Twelve Meridians. It makes sense that as conduits for “qigong” they would not have specific points. Why then do the Ren Mai and Du Mai have unique unto themselves points? One possible explanation is that the points on the Ren and Du were energy gates much like the chakras in kundilini yoga where the progress of energy movement could be felt and charted. Another explanation is that since the Eight Mai are said to run deeper than the 12 main meridians it is possible that their energies could not be accessed from the outside.

The classics give no explanation of the recurring statement that the Eight Mai “all run upwards.” An exception to this statement is that of the Dai Mai, the only vessel to run horizontally. Perhaps the classics wanted to convey the idea of the Eight Mai conducting energy to heaven. This thought would then reflect the ancient Daoist practice of the microcosmic orbit meditation, which involved changing the flow of the Ren Mai to descend and “reverse the water path” in order to complete the microcosmic orbit.

Like the Luo vessels, the Eight Mai do not connect to the zang fu organs. However, they do connect to the extraordinary organs, particularly the brain and uterus. They also intersect the main meridians along their courses.

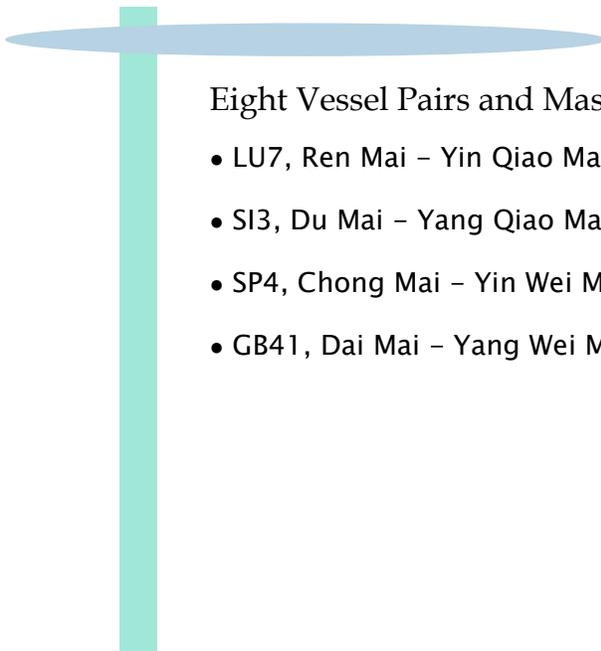
The Eight Extraordinary vessels receive scattered references throughout the Ling Shu and Su Wen. Neither book gives a systematic description of or explains the integration of the vessels with the other channel systems. The Nan Jing does give this description:

*The sages mapped out and constructed ditches and reservoirs, freeing the flow and disinhibiting the water passageways in order to be prepared for unusual situations when heavens rain descended. These ditches and reservoirs spilled over and were filled ... When the network vessels are full and spill over, the channels are not able to detain.*

Thus, the Eight vessels came to be understood as reservoirs that collect excess or supplement deficiency.

The Eight Extraordinary vessels provide another means of energetically defining the body. Their courses contain the only non-bilateral channels (Ren, Du and Dai) and they divide the body along the cardinal plain.

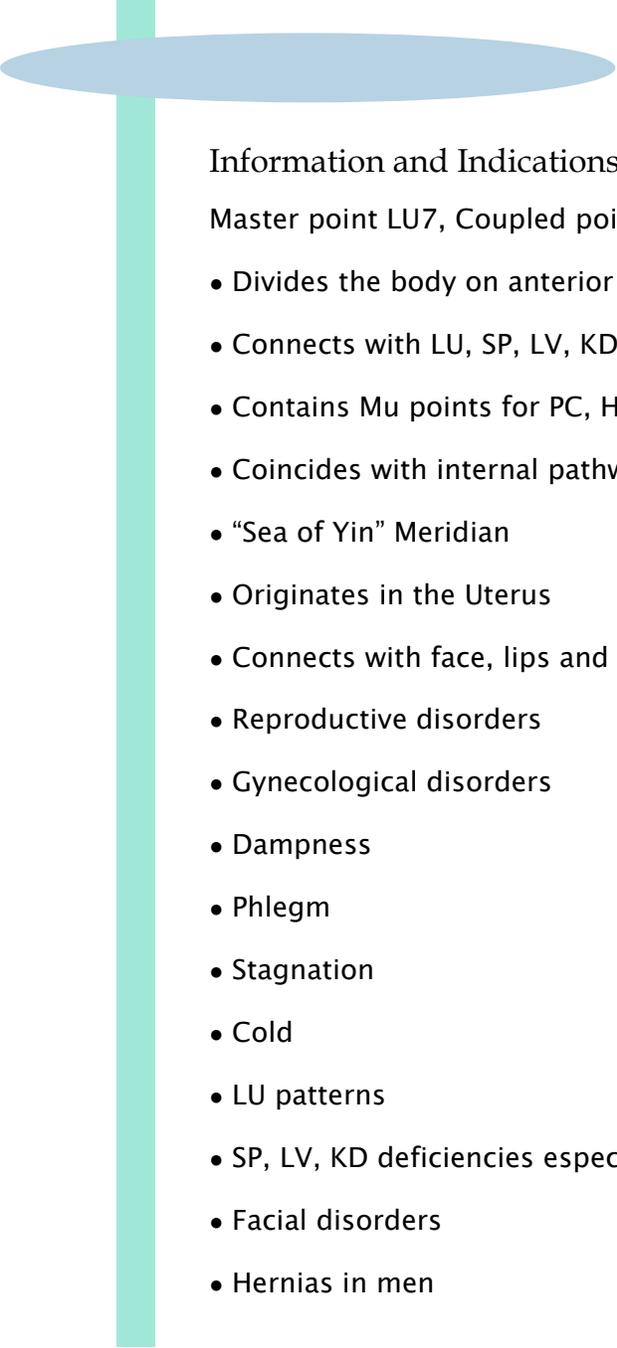
By the time of the Ming dynasty, the Eight Extraordinary vessels had acquired “switches”, defined as intersection (jiao hui) points on the extremities. These switches allowed direct use of their energies by needling at the intersections. The intersections were later translated during western usage as master points. Needling master points allowed a new form of treatment activation by using one point to access specific energies for treatment of specific indications and body region defined by the vessel’s trajectories.



#### Eight Vessel Pairs and Master Points

- LU7, Ren Mai – Yin Qiao Mai, KD6
- SI3, Du Mai – Yang Qiao Mai, UB62
- SP4, Chong Mai – Yin Wei Mai, PC6
- GB41, Dai Mai – Yang Wei Mai, SJ5

The Eight Extraordinary vessels came to connect in various pairs related to function. The cited list is the most popular pairing and is known as Coupled Pairs. The vessels listed on the left are called nuclear vessels (first popularized by John Pirog) as they utilize deep fundamental energies. These also are the primary vessels used in Taoist meditative and spiritual cultivation. The four vessels listed on the right are termed peripheral vessels. Peripheral vessels share indications and are said to gain their energies from the deeper nuclear set of vessels. Both the nuclear and peripheral vessels are often accessed together by needling the master point of both. This is accomplished by designating the point of the most indicated vessel (peripheral or nuclear) as master point and the second as coupled point.



## Information and Indications of the Eight Mai: Ren Mai

Master point LU7, Coupled point KD6

- Divides the body on anterior central axis
- Connects with LU, SP, LV, KD, ST, SI, Yin Wei, Chong and Du
- Contains Mu points for PC, HT, ST, SJ, SI and UB
- Coincides with internal pathway of LU meridian
- “Sea of Yin” Meridian
- Originates in the Uterus
- Connects with face, lips and eyes
- Reproductive disorders
- Gynecological disorders
- Dampness
- Phlegm
- Stagnation
- Cold
- LU patterns
- SP, LV, KD deficiencies especially of yin and xue
- Facial disorders
- Hernias in men

The Ren Mai originates in the uterus in women (the Nan Jing says “the uterus is the same as the dan tien”). It raises along the anterior midline connecting with meridians on the anterior of the body, encircling the lips and entering the eyes.

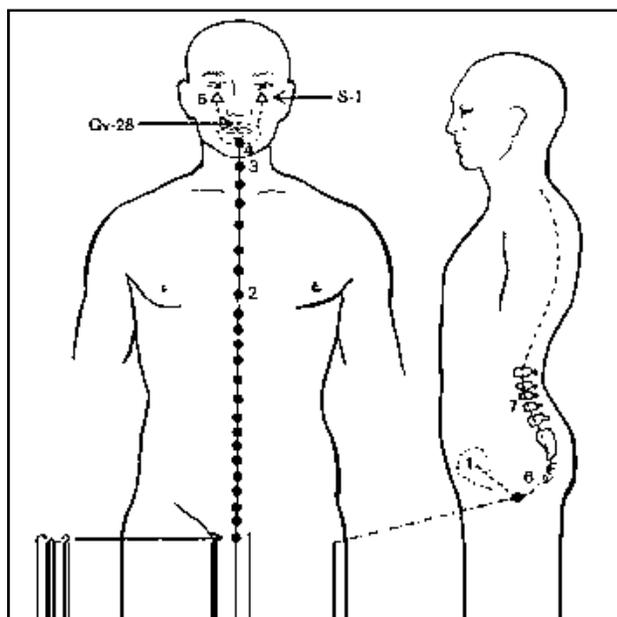
The divergent pathway of the lung meridian is also described as descending along the anterior midline of the body. LU7 is the Luo point of the lung and is indicated for descending fluids and breath. LU7 is also the master point of the Ren Mai. This suggests that the Ren Mai, through LU7, can be used to regulate up and down movement between the three jiao.

The character Ren means to conceive a child as the Ren originates in the uterus. Therefore, the Ren Mai is the first choice for all reproductive and gynecological disorders.

The Ren Mai is also named the Sea of Yin and is the most yin of all channels. It is indicated for yin deficiency as well as yin pathogens such as cold, dampness, and phlegm. It can also be used for treatment of stagnation of the three jiao: Chest, stomach, and abdomen.

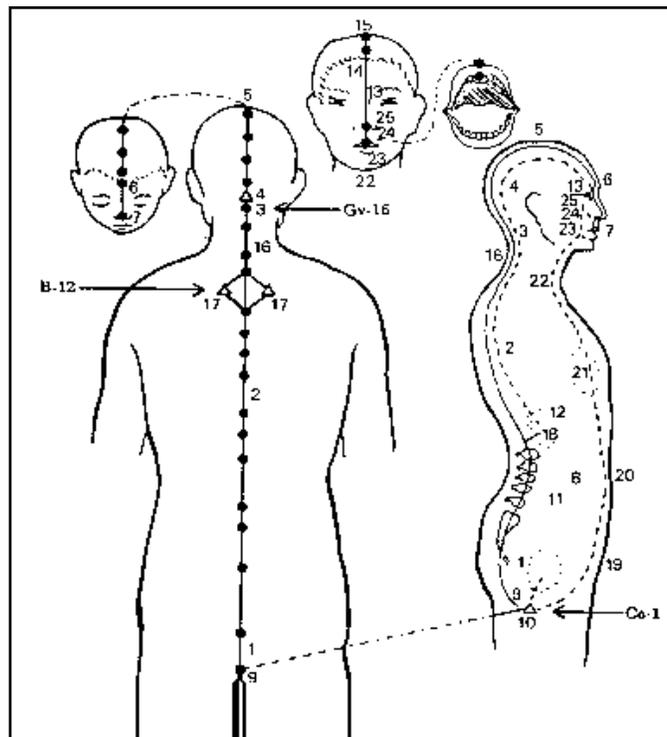
The Ren Mai is indicated in all lung disorders. Its pathway intersects the lung meridian at its master point LU7. The Ren Mai is also indicated for disorders of face, especially the lips and eyes. The Ren Mai originates in the lower abdomen and is indicated for cold (yin) pathogens and is suitable for treatment of hernia.

LU7 is the Luo point of hand Tai Yin. The lung meridian runs analogous to the Ren Mai and is the source of qi and yin for the upper body and the distributor of yin fluids.



## Information and Indications of the Eight Mai: Du Mai

- Master point SI3, Coupled point UB62
- Divides the body on posterior central axis
- Associated with the kidney through ming men
- Disorders of the head and spinal column
- Febrile disorders
- Disorders of the nervous system
- Liver wind disorders
- Shen disorders
- Yang pathogens
- Yang deficiency
- Impotence or infertility



The Du Mai is the most yang of channels. It originates in the dan tien (or uterus) in the same location as the Ren Mai, enters the spine and eventually the brain. This is where yin and yang separate and conversely where they meet at conception. The Luo vessel of the Du Mai separates at DU1, runs parallel to the spine and is similar to the huato jiaji or the inner UB meridian. Thus, the Du Mai rules the posterior and yang surface of the body.

Du means to control or rule over. The Du Mai is usually translated as the controlling or governing vessel. The Du Mai passes between the kidneys at the ming men huo (life gate fire) which is the source of the body's yang. Therefore, all functional yang of the body arises from the Du Mai.

The Du Mai enters the spine and brain. The brain is the sea of marrow. Marrow is produced in the kidney and so the obvious connection is that the Du Mai conducts marrow (cerebral spinal fluid) upwards to the brain to regulate the body's function. Although the sages saw the heart as the seat of consciousness, they saw the sea of marrow and the Du Mai as conducting/controlling that consciousness into action (yang).

As the connection to spine and brain, the Du Mai is indicated for all central nervous system disorders. As indicated from its trajectory, the Du Mai is an excellent choice for disorders of the head and spine.

As the sea of yang meridian, the Du Mai can be used for yang deficiency (moxa on DU4 stokes the ming men fire) as well as for yang pathogens. Wind, both internal and external, can be treated from the Du Mai, and especially all heat disorders are indicated: DU14 is conceded to be the best heat clearing point by many practitioners. Huto jiaji can also be bled in order to alleviate high fevers.

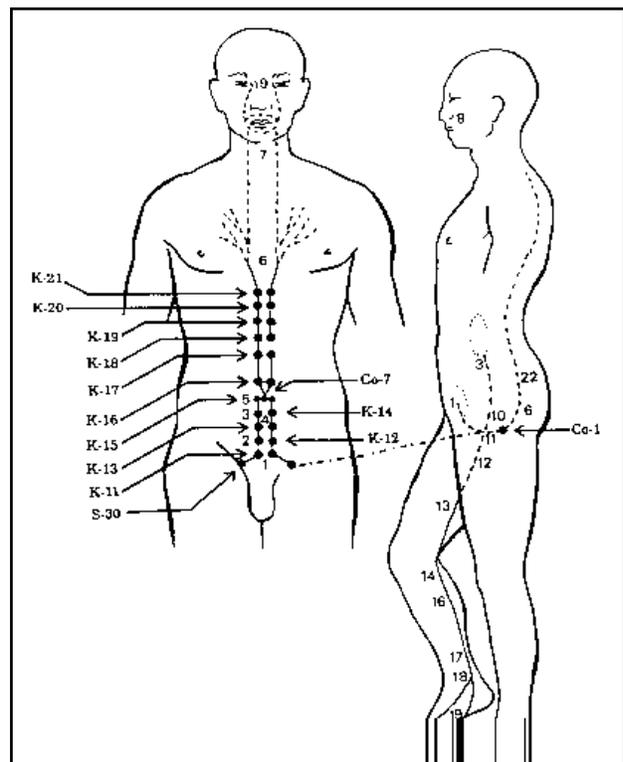
The indications for use of the Du Mai for shen disorders may arise from the above relationship between the heart and head. Stimulating points on the scalp, including DU24 (named shenting or spirit vessel) has a strong neurotransmitter affect. However, the benefit may also derive from the release of yang excess/manic disorders.

Urinary disorders and impotence due to kidney yang deficiency can be supplemented through the Du Mai.

SI3 is the master point of the Du Mai and also the shu-stream and 5 element tonification point for the hand tai yang meridian. The trajectory of the SI meridian includes the neck and upper back adding to this master points prowess. In the treatment of the cervical spine, the SI meridian is Tai Yang and the fire element, making it the obvious place to house the sea of yang's master point.

## Information and Indications of the Eight Mai: Chong Mai

- Master point SP4, Coupled point PC6
- Connects with KD, ST, SP, Ren, Du
- “Sea of blood”
- “Sea of the 12 meridians”
- “Sea of the 5 zhang and 6 fu”
- Associated with the major arteries, Chong meaning to surge
- Associated with circulation of blood
- Associated with the kidneys
- Associated with the stomach
- Regulates menstruation
- Disorders of the blood
- Disorders of the GI tract
- Blood stasis
- Blood deficiency
- Menstrual disorders
- Heart patterns



The Chong Mai, unlike the Ren and Du, has an ambiguous trajectory with differing descriptions in the Nan Jing Su Wen and even different chapters in the Ling Shu. This confusion may be due to its association with the arterial system and the luo vessels. Modern consensus agrees, however, that it originates in the uterus along with the Ren Mai. This seems appropriate because of its designation as the sea of blood. If the Ren and Du transmit yin and yang necessary for reproduction, then the Chong, and perhaps the Dai, supply qi and blood necessary for gestation.

As the sea of blood, the Chong Mai is responsible for menstruation. It is said to fill and empty in conjunction with lunar cycles. Therefore, all menstrual disorders can be treated with the Chong Mai. Since it is the sea of blood, the Chong Mai can treat blood deficiency, blood heat and blood stasis,

The Chong Mai has two more names: The sea of the five zang and six fu, and the sea of the 12 meridians. This makes the Chong Mai unique. If the Eight Extraordinary vessels communicate with the main meridians and the zang-fu, it appears they do so through the Chong Mai. Chapter 38 of the Ling Shu states *“The chong mai is the sea of the five zang and six fu to which the zang-fu all transmit... a branch descends together with the shao yin and seeps into the 3 yin. A branch to the front bends and move to come out at the foot following the instep to the crack of the big toe. Then it seeps into all the luo vessels and flows to the muscles and flesh.”*

This statement is alarming in that an extraordinary vessel that moves up and down connects to organ and meridians as well as to luo vessels. This duality of nature makes sense in light of the chong Mai’s “sea of blood” designation. Blood needs to extend to all tissues including organs and luo vessels. The Chong Mai could be compared to capillaries if one would extend this description of the blood system as being an extension of the Chong Mai.

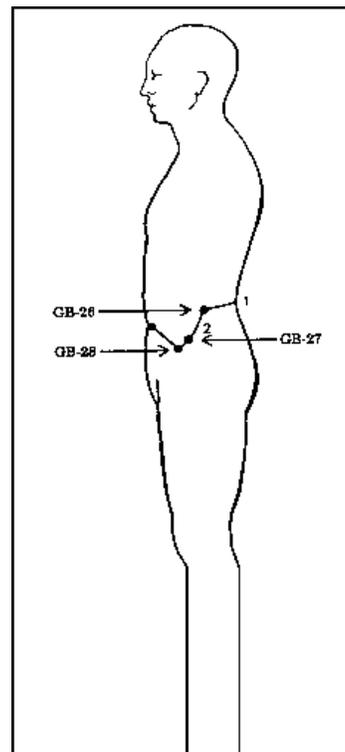
The Chong Mai also has an association with the stomach. The source of fluids and disorders of the stomach can be treated through this vessel.

The Chong Mai is also indicated for heart and shen disorders, presumably due to the heart’s dependence on blood and thus yin for proper functioning.

SP4 is the Luo point of the foot tai yin meridian. The Chong Mai is said to seep into all the Luo vessels at the foot. The spleen is the primary organ for the production of blood and associated with digestion. Because of the description from the Ling Shu of “the crack of the big toe” and its Chinese name (tai chong), some believe LV3 to be the true master point of the Chong Mai.

## Indications and Information of the Eight Mai: Dai Mai

- Master point GB41, Coupled point SJ5
- Connects with GB, ST, LV, Chong and Du
- Supports the upper and lower body
- Connects the upper and lower body
- Connects the front and back of the body
- Associated with the tendons
- Holds the organs up and in
- The character Dai is part of the character for leucorrhea
- Supports the abdominal and lumbar regions
- Associated with the shao yang
- Sagging or weakness of the lumbar or abdomen
- Paralysis and hemiplegia
- Cold-damp disorders of the lower body
- Yang deficiency
- Liver fire and liver yang raising
- Kidney-liver yin deficiency
- Excess in the upper body  
deficiency in the lower body
- Bi patterns



Unique amongst all channels, the Dai Mai possesses a horizontal trajectory encircling the waist like a girdle. The Su Wen says that it links the Du Mai with the Chong Mai and stomach meridians. Taoist meditative practices utilize the Dai Mai by first carrying energies from the Ren and Chong on the front of the body to then meet the Du Mai at DU4 (ming men). The Ling Shu references the Dai Mai linking the stomach meridian and Chong Mai with the Du Mai.

As the Dai Mai functions to connect the front to the back of the body, it also supports the abdomen and lumbar regions. As such, it is indicated for weakness of the lumbar spine and yang deficiency because of its ability to carry yang energies from the Du Mai to the surrounding regions. The Dai Mai also transports blood from the Chong Mai to the muscles. Because of this transporting function, the Dai Mai is indicated for paralysis and atrophy.

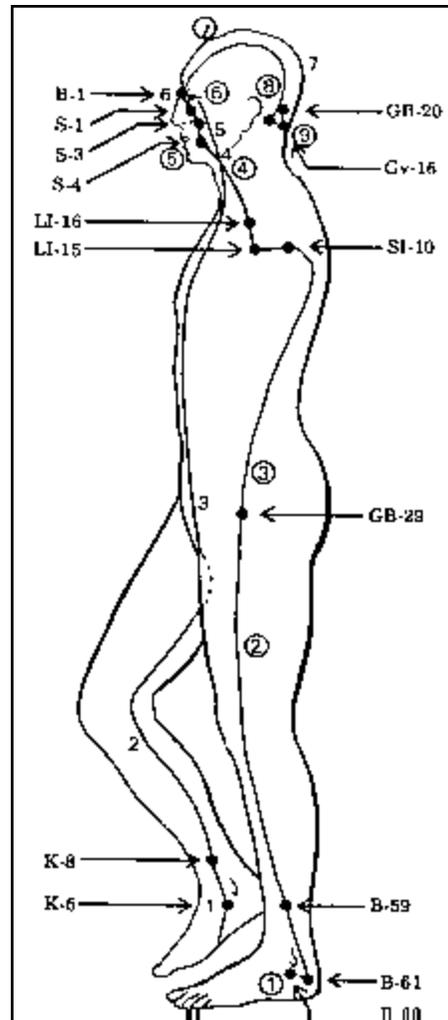
Since the Dai Mai's course passes through the primary yin and yang vessels (the Ren Mai and Du Mai), the Dai Mai is indicated for both yin and yang deficiency. The Dai Mai links yin to yang in the sense of front to back and upper to lower so imbalances such as excess in the upper and its corresponding deficiency in the lower can be harmonized through this vessel. Liver yang rising is an example of an excess in the upper and a deficiency in the lower that can be harmonized through use of this application.

The character Dai can also mean to bear as in to carry or downbear as in descending movement. Thus, this vessel controls dampness in the lower jiao and leucorrhea.

The Dai Mai is further indicated for bi patterns manifesting mostly in the lower body. GB 41 is the shu-stream and same phase point of the foot shao yang meridian. The classical text describe the Dai Mai trajectory in terms of GB points. Interestingly, only the GB meridian of the 12 meridians has the function of balancing front and back, upper and lower imbalances as does the Dai Mai.

## Indications and Information of the 8 Mai: Yin Qiao Mai

- Master point KD6, Coupled point LU7
- Divides the body (esp. legs) along the medial aspect
- Connects with KD, ST, SP, UB, Ren, Yang Wei and Yang Qiao
- Associated with the eyes, enters the brain
- Associated with the medial muscles of the legs
- Associated with the balance of yin and yang
- Associated with the act of walking,  
Qiao meaning to lift the feet
- Lumbar weakness
- Lower abdominal pain/  
pubic pain
- Lethargy :  
“eyes that won’t open”
- Epilepsy with seizures  
during the night
- Inversion of the feet



The four “peripheral vessels” are sets of yin/yang pairs that mirror each other on medial and lateral sides of the body and in oppositional balancing function. In the case of Yin Qiao Mai and Yang Qiao Mai, this balancing function relates to gait and vision.

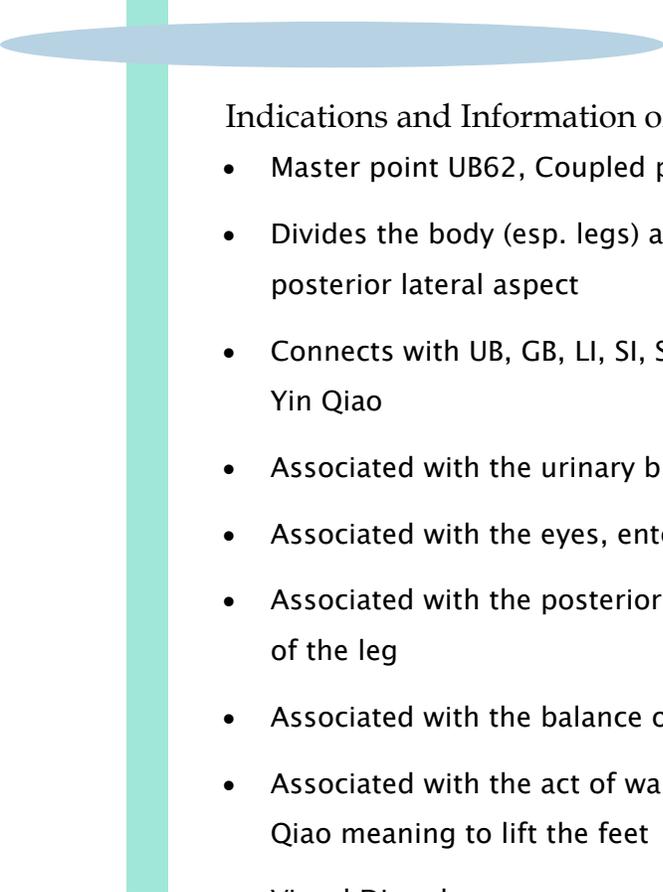
*The Ling Shu says “The leg tai yang has a penetration at the nape of the neck which enters into the brain. This primary subordinates the eye...this penetration enters the brain at the separation of the yin qiao mai and the yang qiao mai for yin and yang intersect mutually, so that yang enters yin and yin comes out of yang with a crossing at the medial corner of the eye. When the yang qi is full it causes the eyes to glare and remain open. When the yin qi is full it causes the eyes to close.”*

This function is similar to the crossing of the optic nerve. This same balancing function relates to gait. When the Yin Qiao Mai is in excess (constrained) and the Yang Qiao Mai is relatively deficient the feet invert. The character qiao means to lift the heel, that is to commence walking. The Yin and Yang Qiao Mai are always indicated for gait disorders.

The Yin Qiao Mai travels on the lower leg from KD2 to KD6 and up to KD8 then entering the lower abdomen. Its master point is KD6 and it pairs with the Ren Mai making the Yin Qiao Mai indicated for all the symptoms of the kidney yin deficiency.

The Yin and Yang Qiao are also indicated with seizure disorders. This makes sense in that they passage through the brain. The Yin Qiao Mai is indicated for seizures that occur more frequently at night (yin time).

KD6 has no other point categories and is probably considered a prime kidney yin tonic point solely due to its association with the yin qiao mai. KD6 is also a strong local point for ankle disorders, which correlates with the both Qiao vessels’ use in gait disorders.



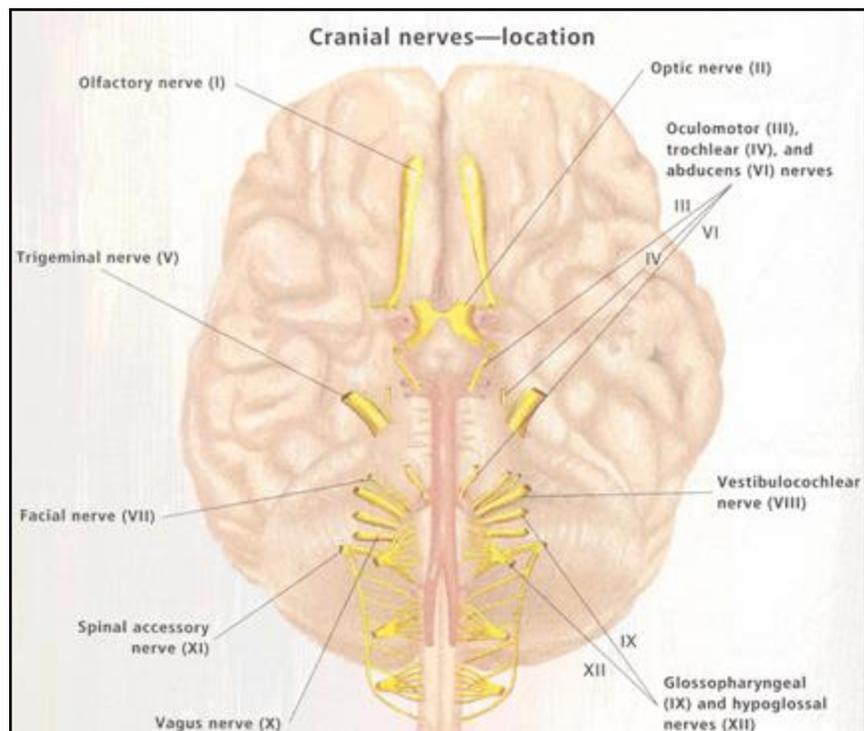
## Indications and Information of the Eight Mai: Yang Qiao Mai

- Master point UB62, Coupled point SI3
- Divides the body (esp. legs) along the posterior lateral aspect
- Connects with UB, GB, LI, SI, ST, Ren, Yang Wei and Yin Qiao
- Associated with the urinary bladder meridian
- Associated with the eyes, enters the brain
- Associated with the posterior lateral muscles of the leg
- Associated with the balance of yin and yang
- Associated with the act of walking, Qiao meaning to lift the feet
- Visual Disorders
- Yin deficiency disorders of the head
- “Eyes that won’t close”
- Eversion of the feet
- Epilepsy with seizures during the day

As previously explained, both the Yin and Yang Qiao are indicated for seizure disorders. The Yang Qiao Mai is indicated for seizures that occur more frequently during the day (yang time).

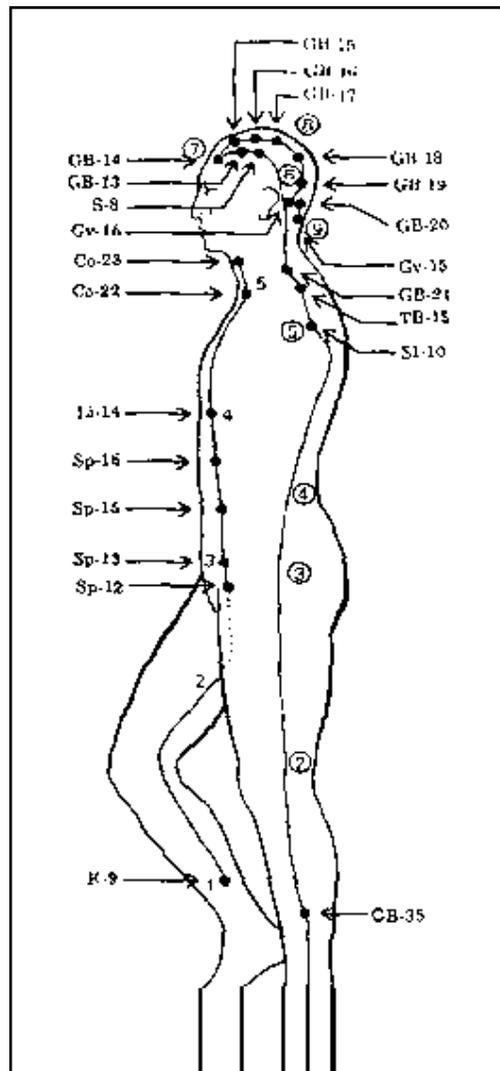
The Yang Qiao Mai follows the UB meridian along the posterior, wrapping itself around the GB on the hip. It balances the Yin Qiao Mai by stabilizing the lateral and posterior (yang) muscles of the lower limbs. It also balances the Yin Qiao Mai through its association with the bladder, the bladder being the yang organ paired with the kidney.

UB62 is the master point of the Yang Qiao Mai and belongs to no other point categories. Appropriately, it is opposite the KD6 below the lateral malleolus and is used as a local point for ankle disorders. It is also frequently used for back pain, as evidenced by the Yang Qiao Mai following the course of the UB meridian and because of its coupling with SI3, the master point of the Du Mai.



## Indications and Information of the 8 Mai: Yin Wei Mai

- Master point PC6, Coupled point SP4
- Links the yin meridians.  
Associated with the medial surfaces of the body
- Connects with; SP, KD, LV and Ren
- Associated with leg tai yin, arm jue yin meridians
- Ties together the will (emotional integrity)
- Associated with the heart and shen



Like the Yin and Yang Qiao Mai, the Yin and Yang Wei Mai engage in a balancing function. Unlike the previous pair, this function relates to the interior and exterior regions and functions of the body.

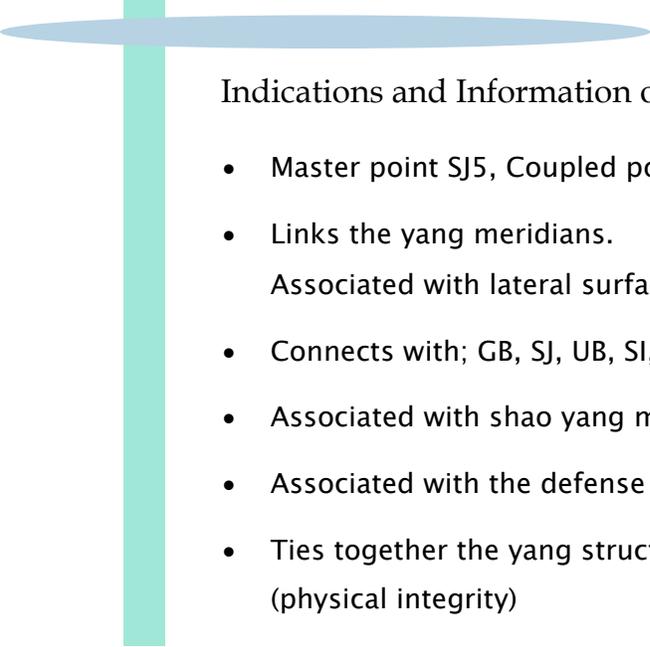
The functions of the Yin and Yang Wei Mai are to “tie together” or secure the body inside and outside.

In terms of the Yin Wei Mai, this internal integrity involves the medial muscles of the arms and legs. The Yin Wei Mai follows the foot tai yin and arm jue yin which run down the middle of the yin and yang meridians. The Nan Jing reinforces this thought: *“The Yin Wei Mai ties the yin meridians.”*

This securing action also applies to the spiritual and emotional integrity of the body through the Yin Wei Mai’s association with the heart.

The Nan Jing says that when the Yin Wei is diseased, one has heartache and *“when the Yin Wei and Yang Wei cannot maintain their ties, one feels uncomfortable and loses one’s mind and one will not be able to hold oneself up.”* Thus, the Yin Wei is indicated for cardiac pain as well as emotional distress.

PC6 is one of the most useful acupoints. It is the Luo point of the pericardium meridian and is indicated for calming the shen as well as clearing excess from the heart. It is situated between the heart and lung meridians. PC6 has the Chinese name of nieguan or inner gate which amplifies the function of the Yin Wei Mai to balance the interior. PC6 also stabilizes the stomach and treats nausea and dizziness.



## Indications and Information of the 8 Qi Mai: Yang Wei Mai

- Master point SJ5, Coupled point GB41
- Links the yang meridians.  
Associated with lateral surfaces of the body
- Connects with; GB, SJ, UB, SI, DU and Yang Qiao
- Associated with shao yang meridians
- Associated with the defense qi
- Ties together the yang structures of the body  
(physical integrity)

The Yang Wei Mai governs the body's exterior, moving along the shao yang meridians which serve a similar function. In the context of the 12 meridians, the Nan Jing says "the Yang Wei Mai ties the yang meridians." Like the shao yang meridians, the Yang Wei Mai is indicated for disorders that manifest themselves unilaterally. The Yang Wei Mai balances left and right.

The Yang Wei Mai is associated with the defense of the exterior and the wei qi. The Nan Jing says "*when the yang wei is diseased, there is the bitterness of cold and heat.*" This statement is interpreted as meaning that pathologies of the yang wei include chills and fever associated with external wind conditions.

This maintenance of the body's external integrity also relates to muscle well-being and conversely, disorders of the muscles. The Nan Jing cites flaccidity as an indication for the use of the Yang Wei Mai, also suggesting the Yang Wei for treatment of paralysis and atrophy (wei syndrome).