

NAN-CHING

Chapter One: Vessel Movements & Diagnostic Significance, cont'd.

(Difficult Issues 1-22, here, 17-22).

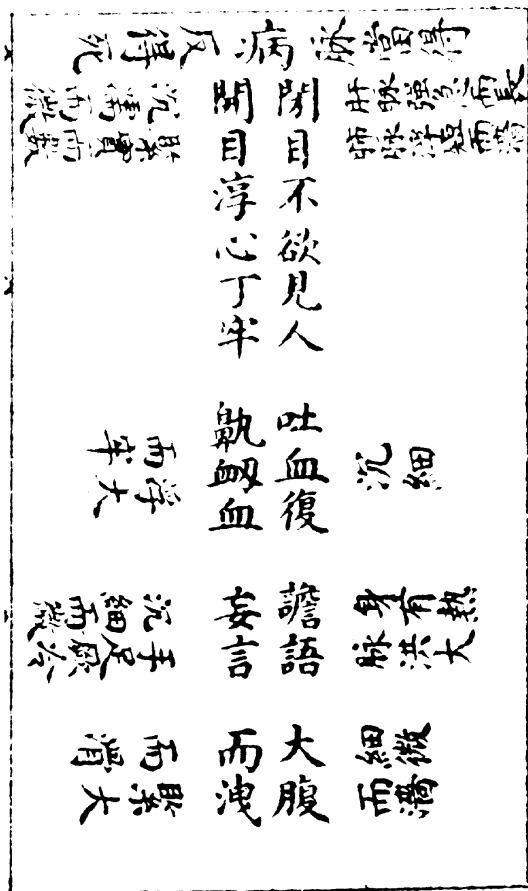
THE SEVENTEENTH DIFFICULT ISSUE

Overview: How to predict a patient's impending death or survival by comparing the movement in his vessels with other manifestations of his illness.

十七難曰(一)經言病或有死或有不治自愈或連年月不己其死生存亡可切脈而知之耶(二)然可盡知也診病若閉目不欲見人者脈當得肝脈強急而長(三)而反得肺脈浮短而濇者死也(四)病若開目而渴心下牢者脈當得緊實而數反得沉濡而微者死也(五)病若吐血復衄衄血者脈當沈細而反浮大而牢者死也(六)病若譫言妄語身當有熱脈當洪大而手足厥逆脈沈細而微者死也(七)病若大腹而洩者脈當微細而濇反緊大而滑者死

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十七難有得得圖  
七脈當反



The seventeenth difficult issue: (1) The scripture states: In case of an illness one may die, or a cure will occur by itself without any treatment, or [the illness] will continue for years and months without remission. Is it possible, by feeling<sup>1</sup> the [movement in the] vessels, to know whether the respective [person] will die or survive, will continue to exist or will perish?

(2) It is like this. This can be known entirely. If one examines a patient who keeps his eyes closed and does not wish to look at anybody, one should feel a liver [movement in his] vessels that is vigorous, tense, and extended. (3) If one feels, in contrast to this, a lung [movement in the] vessels, which is short, rough, and at the surface, that [signals] death. (4) If the patient has his eyes open and is thirsty, and if there is a firm [area] below his heart, the [movement in the] vessels should be tight, replete, and frequent. If it is, in contrast, in the depth, rough, and slight, that [signals] death.

(5) If the patient spits blood, and [if he suffers from] repeated snuffles and nose-bleeding, the [movement in the] vessels should be deep and fine. If it is, in contrast, at the surface, strong, and firm, that is [a sign of] death. (6) If the patient speaks incoherently and utters nonsense, his body should be hot, and the [movement in the] vessels should be vast and strong. If, in contrast, hands and feet are marked by reversed [moving influences], and if the [movement in the] vessels is deep, fine, and slight, that is [a sign of] death. (7) If the patient has a large abdomen and [suffers from] diarrhea, the [movement in the] vessels should be slight, fine, and rough. If it is, in contrast, tight, strong, and smooth, that is [a sign of] death.<sup>2</sup>

### *Unschuld's Footnotes*

1. The term ch'ieh, alludes to the image of "cutting" into the vessels with the tip of one's fingers. In Kato Bankei's commentary to difficult issue 16 (sentences 1 through 35), I have translated ch'ieh in this literal meaning. In the text of the Nan-ching, however, I render ch'ieh as "to feel" to avoid misinterpretations that might be evoked by a literal translation.
2. Various commentators have expressed the opinion that the text of this difficult issue is corrupt. This may be indeed the case because the structure of the response in sentences 2 through 7 is unusually unsystematic. Sentences 4 and 6 are both devoted to the appearance of kidney symptoms in case of an illness in the heart; an illness in the kidneys is not mentioned at all. Some authors have assumed that the question in sentence 1 raises three issues, while the answer responds to only one of them. I do not agree with this argument because, in my opinion, the question begins—after a general introductory statement—with ch'i ssu sheng. The fragmentary character of this difficult issue has lead Kato Bankei to believe that sentences 12 through 19 of difficult issue 18 actually belong to this difficult issue. In his edition of the Nan-ching he has, therefore, moved them here to follow sentence 7.

## **THE EIGHTEENTH DIFFICULT ISSUE**

*Overview:* Systematized presentation of the correspondences of the yin and yang conduits with the inch-, gate-, and foot-sections near the wrist where the movement in the vessels can be felt, on the basis of the mutual generation order of the Five Phases. Also, discussion of methods for recognizing internal accumulations and chronic illnesses through the movement in the vessels.

The eighteenth difficult issue: (1) The [movement in the] vessels appears in three sections; [each] section has four conduits, with the great-yin and the yang-brilliance [conduits] of the hands, and the great-yang and the minor-yin [conduits] of the feet constituting the upper and the lower sections. What does that mean?

(2) It is like this. The hand-great-yin and the [hand-]yang-brilliance [conduits] are [associated with the phase of] metal; the foot-minor-yin and the [foot-]great-yang [conduits] are [associated with the phase

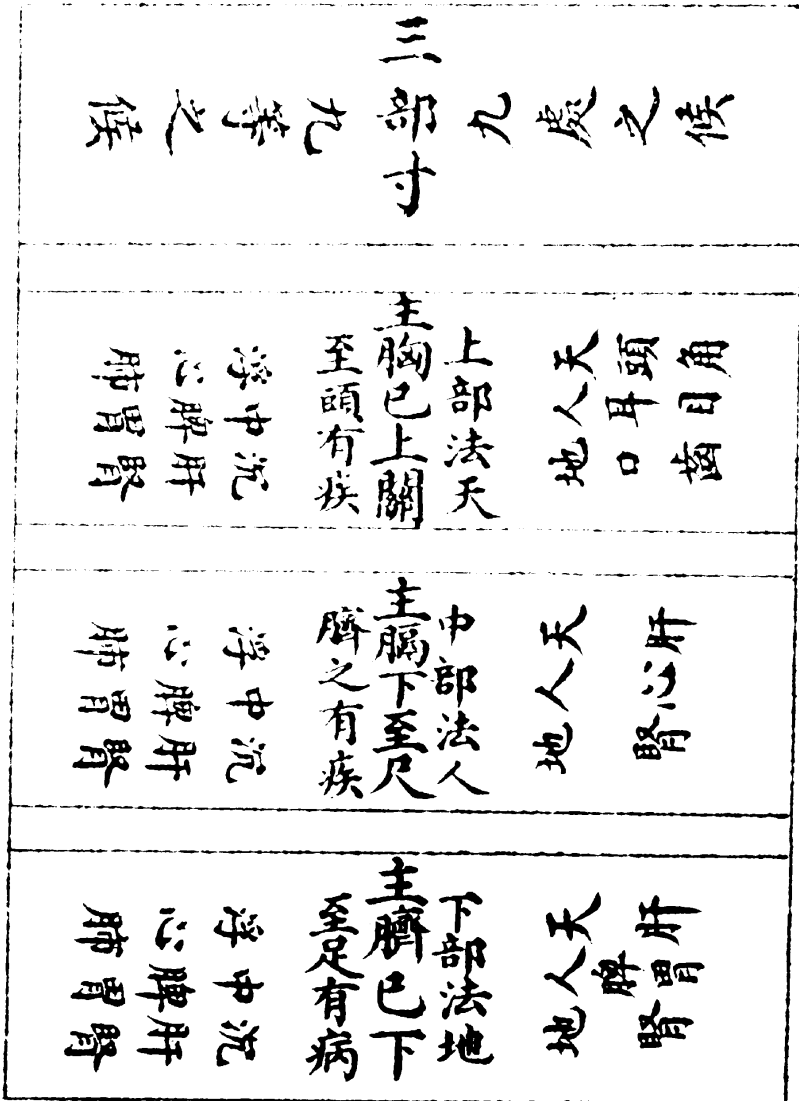
of] water. Metal generates water. Water flows downward and is unable to ascend. Therefore, [the foot-minor-yin and the foot-great-yang conduits can be felt] at the section below [the gate].

十八難曰(一)脈有三部部有四經手有太陰陽明足有太陽少陰爲上下部何謂也(二)然手太陰陽明金也足少陰太陽水也金生水水流下行而不能上故在下部也(三)足厥陰少陽木也生手太陽少陰火火炎上行而不能下故爲上部(四)手心主少陽火生足太陰陽明土土主中宮故在中部(五)此皆五行子母更相生養者也(六)脈有三部九候各何所主之(七)然三部者寸關尺也九候者浮中沈也(八)上部法天主胸以上至頭之有疾也(九)中部法人主膈以下至齊之有疾也(十)下部法地主齊以下至足之有疾也(十一)審而刺之者也(十二)人病有沉滯久積聚可切脈而知之耶(十三)然診在右脇有積氣得肺脈結脈結甚則積甚結微則氣微(十四)診不得肺脈而右脇有積氣者何也(十五)然肺脈雖不見右手脈當沈伏(十六)其外痼疾同法耶將異也(十七)然結者脈來去時一止無常數名曰結也伏者脈行筋下也浮者脈在肉上行也(十八)左右表裏法皆如此(十九)假令脈結伏者內無積聚脈浮結者外無痼疾(二十)有積聚脈不結伏有痼疾脈不浮結爲脈不應病病不應脈是爲死病也

- (3) The foot-ceasing-yin and the [foot-]minor-yang [conduits] are [associated with the phase of] wood; it generates the [phase of] fire, [which is associated with the] hand-great-yang and the [hand-]minor-yin [conduits]. The flames of fire ascend; they are unable to move downward. Hence, [the hand-great-yang and the hand-minor-yin conduits can be felt] at the section above [the gate]. (4) The hand-heart-master and the [hand-]minor-yang [conduits are associated with the phase of] fire; it generates the [phase of] soil, [which is associated with the] foot-great-yin and with the [foot-]yang-brilliance [conduits]. The soil rules the central palace and is, therefore, situated in the central section. (5) All of this is [in accordance with] the mutual generation and nourishment of the Five Phases [as in a] child-mother [relationship]. (6) The [movement in the] vessels appears in three sections and on nine indicator[-levels]. By which illnesses are the [movements in these sections and on these levels] governed, respectively?

(7) It is like this. The three sections concerned are the inch[-section], the gate[-section], and the foot[-section]. The nine indicator[-levels] refer to surface, center, and depth [of each of the three sections]. (8) The upper section is patterned after heaven; it is governed by illnesses located from the chest upward to the head. (9) The central section is patterned after man; it is governed by illnesses located below the diaphragm to the navel. (10) The lower section is patterned after earth; it is governed by illnesses located below the navel to the feet. (11) [For a treatment, one should first] conduct a careful examination [as to which section displays which movement in the vessels] and only then apply the needles.

十八難三部九候圖



(12) When a person suffers from deep, stagnant, and long-term accumulations [of influences], can this be known by feeling the vessels?

(13) It is like this. Consider that an examination reveals an accumulation of influences in the right side of the human body, and furthermore, that one feels a knotty [movement in the conduit] vessel [associated with the] lung. [In this case] the accumulation is extensive if the knotty [character of the movement in the] vessels is extensive; the [accumulation of] influences is slight if the knotty [character of the movement is] slight.

(14) What is the matter, though, if one feels nothing in the [conduit] vessel [associated with the] lung, and if there is still an accumulation of influences in the right side of the body?

(15) It is like this. Although a [movement in the conduit] vessel [associated with the] lung is not apparent, a deep and subdued [movement in the] vessels must be present in the right hand.

(16) Does the same pattern apply to chronic illnesses in the outer [sections of the body], or should different [considerations be applied here]?

(17) It is like this. "Knotty" [means that] the [movement in the] vessels stops once in a while in the process of coming and going, and that this does not occur with regular frequency. That is called

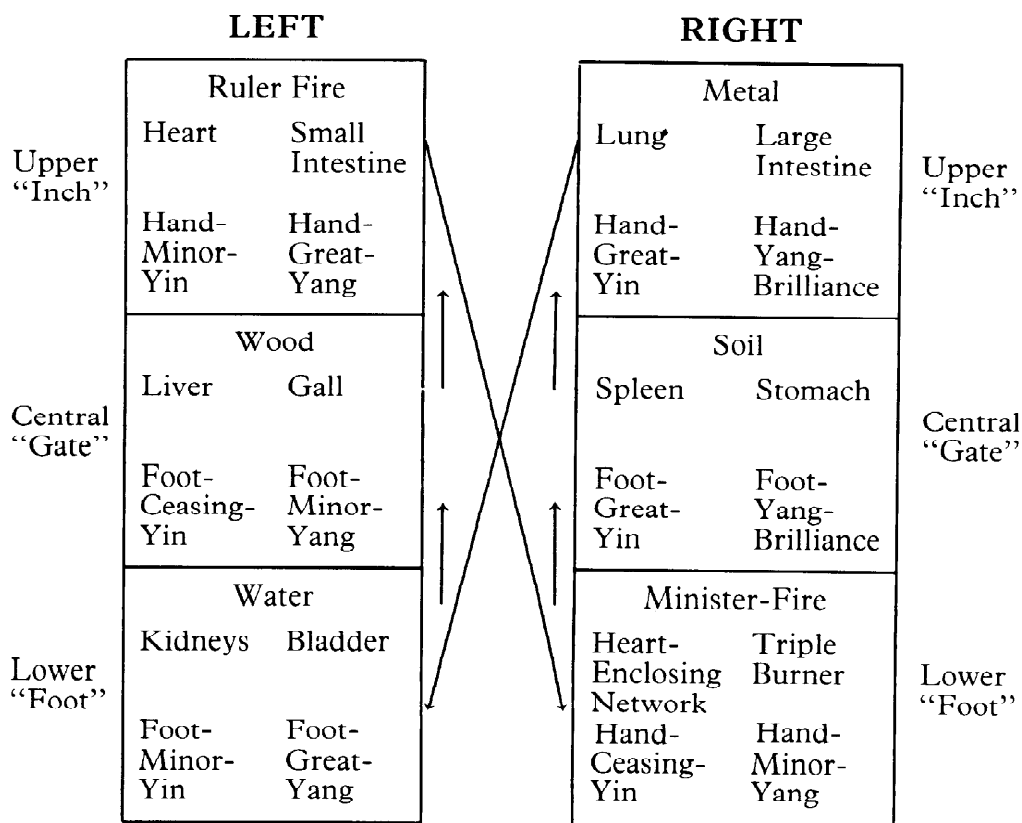
"knotty." To be "subdued" [means that] the movement in the vessels occurs below the muscles. "At the surface" [means that] the movement in the vessels occurs above the flesh.<sup>1</sup> (18) No matter whether [an illness is situated in the] left or right side, in the external or internal parts [of the body], the pattern is always like this. (19) If, for instance, the [movement in the] vessels is knotty and subdued, no accumulation exists internally; if the [movement in the] vessels is at the surface and knotty, no chronic illness exists in the external [sections of the body]. (20) If, however, in the case of accumulations, the [movement in the] vessels is not knotty and subdued, or if, in case of a chronic illness, the [movement in the] vessels is not at the surface and knotty, that means that the [movement in the] vessels does not correspond to the illness, and that the illness does not correspond to the [movement in the] vessels. Such illnesses are fatal.<sup>2</sup>

### *Unschuld's Footnotes*

1. The Chinese wording here could indicate a belief in the passage (hsing) of individual vessels through the wrist. Thus, the last sentence could also be translated as: " 'At the surface' [means that] the vessel passes above the flesh". However, in accordance with the preceding and following passages, I have preferred a rendering indicating a concept of one vessel with several levels and sections. This, of course, should not exclude the concept of various conduits passing through the arms and wrists. The question (to which I shall return in note 2) is whether the movement in a single vessel was investigated for diagnostic purposes, or whether separate vessels were pressed to assess the movement of the influences through each of them. It is rather difficult to assume that the author(s) thought that a single vessel could change its position from the depth below the muscles to the surface above the flesh, or that the movement could cease in one vessel for some extended period and appear in another vessel. These would be logical consequences if one were to apply the multi-vessel concept here. See also difficult issue 1.

2. The first section of this difficult issue (sentences 1 through 5) once again offers an innovative diagnostic pattern using terms from the Nei-ching but supplying them with a very different meaning. A comparison with the Su-wen treatise "San pu chiu hou lun" appears in Hsü Ta-ch'un's commentary on sentence 6 and need not be repeated here. Yet the pattern developed in the first section of this difficult issue is only hinted at. If Yü Shu is correct in his commentary on sentence 4, the data provided can be put into tabular form as below.

This pattern displays a relatively high level of theorization, and it is not clear whether the author(s) believed in the actual presence of the individual conduits in the respective sections or whether—on the basis of systematic correspondence—the terms "great-yang," "minor-yin," and so on indicate the kinds of movement in one single vessel (as outlined in difficult issue 7, sentences 1 through 6). With this schema, which appears to transcend all previous patterns, an apex was reached in the process of supplying vessel diagnosis at the wrist with a theoretical foundation. Both the yinyang associations of the six depots and six palaces and their mutual relationships on the basis of the Five Phases doctrine appear to have been taken into account. Although not stated explicitly by the text of the Nan-ching, here for the first time it may have been realized that the left hand and the right hand offer different information.



The rationale given for the allocation of the individual conduits in one of the six sections followed the mutual generation order of the Five Phases; the latter was abstracted here to such a degree that Liao P'ing, the conservative commentator in favor of what he considered the more down-to-earth argumentation in the Nei-ching, denounced this first section as "empty talk" (see his commentary on sentence 3).

The second section appears to integrate the patterns outlined in difficult issues 1 through 4. After reading the question in sentence 6 one might expect, as an answer, a complicated summary of all the diagnostic data that can be obtained from the three cross-sections and nine longitudinal levels (as outlined in the early difficult issues). Yet the response that actually follows could be called incomplete. It may have been intended merely as a concluding statement, omitting the details which any interested reader could fill in by himself. Kato Bankei concluded that this section should be considered as difficult issue 3.

The third section, finally, appears out of place here. Various commentators have suggested that it originally may have been part of difficult issue 17 or some other treatise.

### THE NINETEENTH DIFFICULT ISSUE

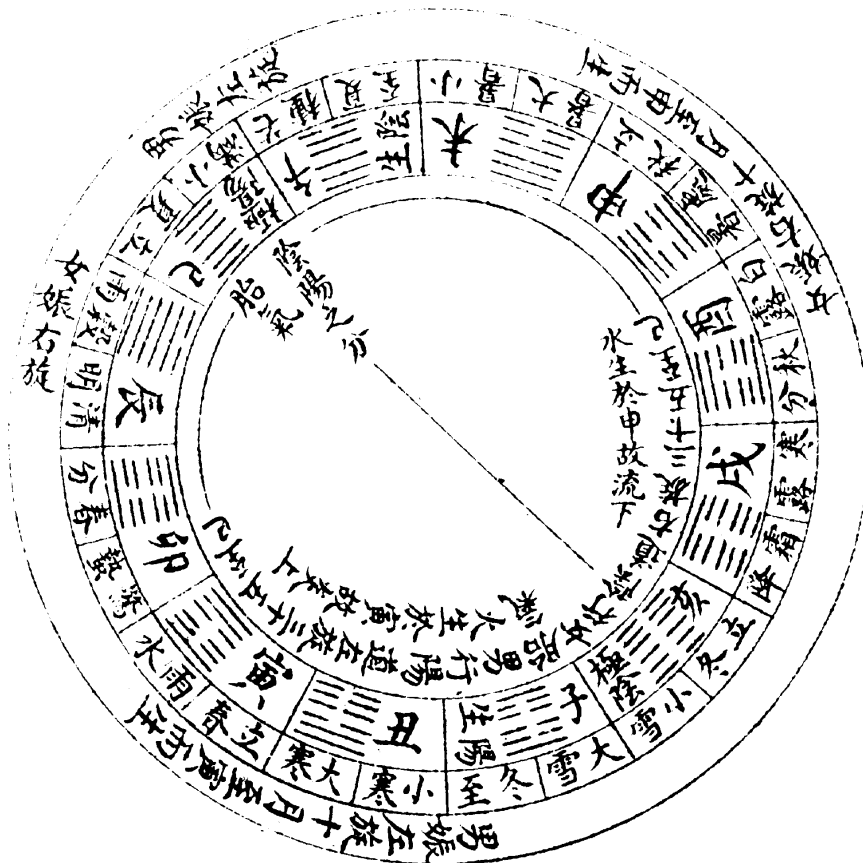
*Overview:* Introduction of the concept of differences in the movement in the vessels in males and females.

十九難曰(一)經言脈有逆順男女有常而反者何謂也(二)然男子生於寅寅爲木陽也(三)女子生於申申爲金陰也(四)故男脈在關上女脈在關下(五)是男子尺脈恆弱女子尺脈恆盛是其常也(六)反者男得女脈女得男脈也(七)其爲病何如(八)然男得女脈爲不足病在內(九)左得之病則在左右得之病則在右隨脈言之也(十)女得男脈爲太過病在四肢(十一)左得之病則在左右得之病則在右隨脈言之此之謂也

The nineteenth difficult issue: (1) The scripture states: The [movement in the] vessels may be contrary to or in accordance with [the proper course of influences]. In males and females it may be regular<sup>1</sup> or in contrast [to what is regular]. What does that mean?

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### 圖反相有女男難九十



(2) It is like this. A male child is born in a yin [month]; a yin [month is associated with the phase of] wood, and that is yang.

(3) A female child is born in a shen [month]; a shen [month is associated with the phase of] metal, and that is yin. (4) Hence, in males [a strong movement in] the vessels appears above the gate; in females [a strong movement in the] vessels appears below the gate.

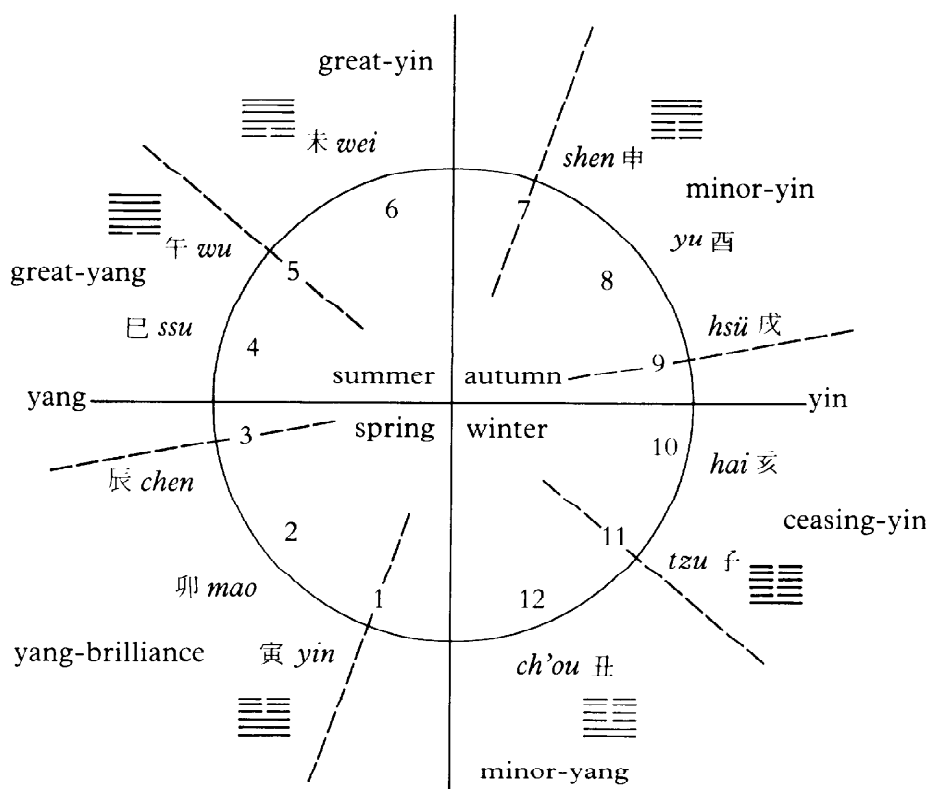
(5) Therefore, if in males the [movement in the] vessels is constantly weak in the foot[-section], or if in females the [movement in the] vessels is constantly full in the foot [-section], that is their regular condition. (6) In a situation that is in contrast to [such a regular condition], a male's vessels display a female [movement, or] a female's vessels display a male [movement].

(7) What kinds of illness does that indicate?

(8) It is like this. If a male's vessels display a female [movement, that indicates that the yang influences are] not enough, and that the illness is situated in the internal [parts of the body]. (9) [In this case] an illness which is felt in the left [hand] is, in fact, located in the left [side of the body], and an illness which is felt in the right [hand] is, in fact, located in the right [side of the body]. The illness can be determined in accordance with the [actual symptoms displayed by the] vessels. (10) If a female's vessels display a male [movement, that indicates that the yang influences] greatly exceed [their normal limits], and that the illness is situated in the four extremities. (11) [In this case, too,] an illness which is felt in the left [hand] is, in fact, located in the left [side of the body], and an illness which is felt in the right [hand] is, in fact, located in the right [side of the body]. The illness can be determined in accordance with the [actual symptoms displayed by the] vessels. This is [what is] meant by all the [terms mentioned initially].<sup>2</sup>

**Unschuld's Footnotes**

1. Later editions have heng, instead of ch'ang.
2. This difficult issue is based on the innovative assumption that the movement in the vessels of males and females is different. Hence, these differences have to be taken into account during an examination. The theoretical rationale in sentences 2 and 3 corresponds to the calendrical cycle of the Twelve Earth Branches (ti-chih). The application of this pattern is outlined by various commentators below.
3. Tzu is the month of winter solstice. The following calculations are based on the pattern of the cycle of the Twelve Earth Branches:



THE TWENTIETH DIFFICULT ISSUE

Overview: Introduction of the concepts of hidden and concealed movements in the vessels, of doubled influences and of lost influences.

二十難曰(一)經言脈有伏匿伏匿於何藏而言伏匿耶(二)謂陰陽更相乘更相伏也(三)脈居陰部而反陽脈見者為陽乘陰也(四)脈雖時沉濇而短此謂陽中伏陰也(五)脈居陽部而反陰脈見者為陰乘陽也(六)脈雖時浮滑而長此謂陰中伏陽也(七)重陽者狂重陰者癲(八)脫陽者見鬼脫陰者目盲

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二十難有伏匿圖

寸為陽部而反見陰脈  
時浮滑而長

為陰乘陽中陰伏陽

尺為陰部而反見陽脈  
時沉濇而短

為陽乘陰中陽伏陰

The twentieth difficult issue: (1) The scripture states: The [movement in the] vessels may be hidden and concealed. In which depot could [influences] be hidden and concealed so that one may speak of them as being hidden and concealed?

(2) It is like this. [The statement referred to] implies that yin and yang [influences] seize each other's [proper section], and that yin and yang [influences may] hide in each other. (3) A [yin movement in the] vessels resides in the yin section. If, in contrast, a yang [movement in the] vessels appears here, this indicates that yang [influences] have seized the yin [section]. (4) But if [that movement in the yin] vessels is at times deep, rough, and short, this indicates that yin [influences] lie hidden among the yang [influences]. (5) A [yang movement in the] vessels resides in the yang section. If, in contrast, a yin [movement in the] vessels appears here, this indicates that yin [influences] have seized the yang [section]. (6) But if [that movement in the yang] vessels is at times at the surface, smooth, and extended, this implies that yang [influences] lie hidden among the yin [influences]. (7) A doubling of the yang [influences results in] madness; a doubling of the yin [influences results in] falling sickness. (8) When the yang [influences] are lost, one sees demons; when the yin [influences] are lost, one's eyes turn blind.

THE TWENTY-FIRST DIFFICULT ISSUE

Overview: On the prognostic significance of situations where a patient's bodily appearance shows signs of illness while the movement in his vessels does not, and vice versa.

二十一難曰(一)經言人形病脈不病曰生脈病形不病曰死何謂也(二)然人形病脈不病非有不病者也謂息數不應脈數也(三)此大法

## 21

二一形脈之相反相成圖

其人即  
其脈息數不

相 相

應 應

應脈數形病  
同行屍形平

The twenty-first difficult issue: (1) The scripture states: If a person's [bodily] form has an illness while the [movement in his] vessels has no illness, that implies life. If the [movement in the] vessels has an illness while the [bodily] form has no illness, that implies death. What does that mean?

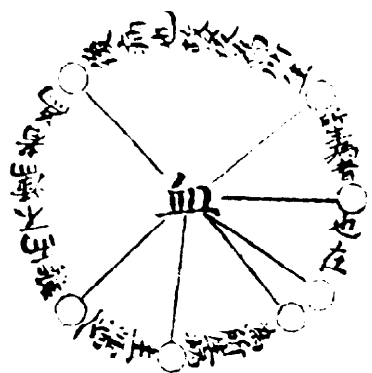
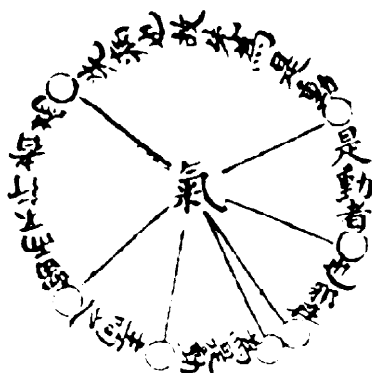
(2) It is like this. If a person's [bodily] form has an illness while the [movement in his] vessels has no illness, that does not mean that [the movement in his vessels has] no illness; it means that one's breathing frequency does not correspond to the [movement in the] vessels. (3) That is a pattern of great [importance]!

## THE TWENTY-SECOND DIFFICULT ISSUE

*Overview:* Elaboration of the concepts of illnesses in the vessels that are "excited" and of those that are "generated."

二十二難曰(一)經言脈有是動(二)有所生病(三)一脈輒變為二病者何也(四)然輕言是動者氣也所生病者血也(五)邪在氣氣為是動(六)邪在血血為所生病(七)氣主响之(八)血主濡之(九)氣留而不行者為氣先病也(十)血壅而不濡者為血後病也故先為是動後所生病也

二十難變之圖  
二脈為一病



The twenty-second difficult issue: (1) The scripture states: The [movement in the] vessels may be excited, (2) and it may be marked by illnesses that are generated. (3) One single [movement in the] vessels may, therefore, be the result of two kinds of illness. How is that?

(4) It is like this. When the scripture speaks of "excitement," the influences are meant; [when the scripture speaks of] illnesses "that are generated," the blood is meant. (5) When evil [influences] have entered one's [proper] influences, these influences will be excited. (6) When evil [influences] have entered one's blood, the blood will have an illness that is generated [by the illness that had affected the influences first]. (7) The influences are responsible for providing the [body] with a warm flow; (8) the blood is responsible for providing the [body] with moisture. (9) When the influences stagnate and do not move, the influences were affected by an illness first. (10) When the blood is obstructed [in its movement] and fails to moisten the body, the blood was affected by that illness later on. Thus, first comes an excitement and then, afterward, [come the illnesses] that are generated.<sup>1</sup>

*Unschuld's Footnotes*

1. This difficult issue introduces new meanings for the Ling-shu terms shih-tung, and so-sheng-ping. It states that when evil influences hit the organism, they affect the protective influences first and the blood afterward. This is a rather straight-forward message, yet the commentaries added by later authors are rather heterogeneous. The reasons for the great degree of conceptual confusion and for the absence of a stringent, technical terminology in the medicine of systematic correspondence are highlighted here most clearly. They are to be seen in the fact that at no time in the first or second millennium did more recent conceptual insights replace older views for good. Instead, later innovative ideas (and the contents of the Nan-ching are to be counted among them) were interpreted by some commentators on the basis of their understanding of the "original" concepts, while others accepted the innovations for what they were. When an author introduced a new meaning of an ancient term, this meaning did not eventually replace the older meaning(s) but was merely added to the existing range of meanings. This increased the insecurity among the readers as to what a particular author really wanted to say. Porkert (*The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, Cambridge, Mass., 1974) repeatedly states that Chinese medicine, in contrast to modern Western medicine, is characterized by a "stringent scientific terminology," yet no historical evidence is available to support this claim.

The terms shih-tung and so-sheng-ping can be traced to the Yin-yang shih-i mo chiu ching, a fragment of which was found among the Ma-wang-tui scripts in the early 1970s (see Anon., Wu-shih-erh ping fang, Peking, 1979, pp. 10-20). This fragment contains a listing of the then eleven mai which were not yet understood as parts of a circulatory system of conduits, but as individual entities. It is not even clear whether the Yin-yang shih-i mo chiu ching, considered the mai—as did for instance the Ma-wang-tui fragment Mai-fa—as tube-like entities which could contain too much or not enough ch'i , or whether it still saw them as strings linking various sections of the body. It may have been the string concept of mai which led to the terms shih-tung, and so-ch'an-ping. Shih-tung could be interpreted as "set in motion" and so-ch'an-ping as the "illnesses resulting secondarily" from the mai-motion. Hence, for each of the eleven mai, the yin-yang shih-i-mo chiu ching lists various symptoms indicating the motion itself, and then various symptoms (partly overlapping with the former) indicating the illnesses resulting from that motion.

In the treatise "Ching-mai" of the Ling-shu, we find an obviously more recent listing of the characteristics of the now twelve conduit-vessels. The structure of the descriptions is the same as in the Yin-yang shih-i mo chiu ching. After an outline of the course a conduit takes in the body, the text says shih-tung and lists a number of illnesses. Since the string concept of the mai cannot be applied here, the meaning of the ancient terms must have been changed. Chang Yin-an (ca. 1700), in his Huang-ti nei-ching ling-shu chi-chu, may have been correct when he interpreted shih-tung as "affected by an external stimulus", and so-sheng-ping (which replaced so-ch'an-ping) as "illnesses generated internally," possibly as a secondary result of the primary affect. The terms appeared again, supplied with a third meaning, in the Nan-ching.