

## An Overview of Extraordinary Vessel Pulse Diagnosis

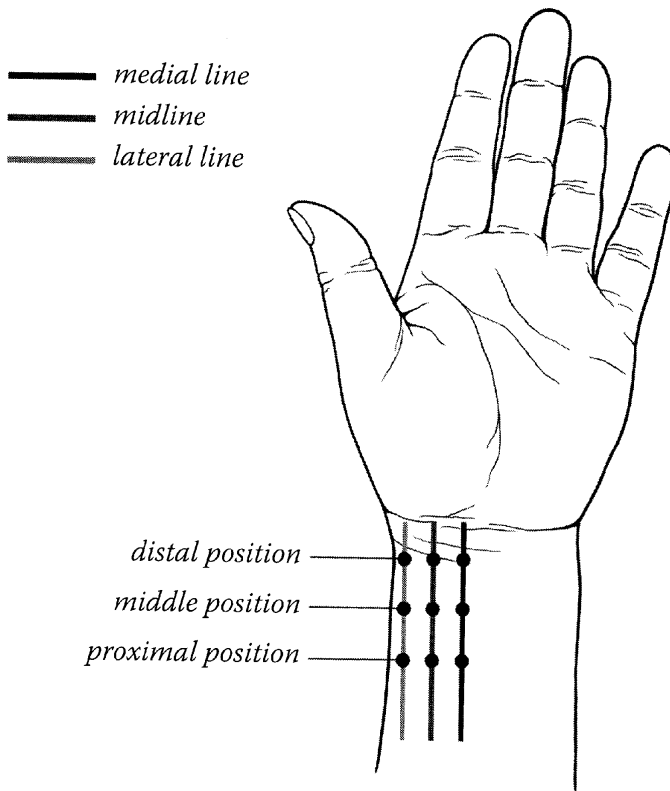
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Diagnosis in Chinese medicine optimally relies on both subjective and objective information. Our patients must tell us their complaints, but it is equally important that we have independent means of assessing their condition. It is difficult to have any real confidence in one's diagnosis based on subjective information alone. Hence, we rely heavily on the information gleaned from the tongue, pulse, and abdomen. In a sense, this is how we most immediately interact with a patient's qi. A variety of diagnostic techniques appear sporadically throughout *Exposition on the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Li Shi-Zhen discusses both abdominal palpation and the palpation of holes on the chest in the context of the *chong*. For Li, however, pulse diagnosis is the objective assessment of choice, and he discusses its role in the pathology of every extraordinary vessel. To drive this point home, he devotes a closing section specifically to the pulses of the extraordinary vessels.

We will consider the role of each individual extraordinary vessel pulse as it appears throughout Li's *Exposition*, and we will examine them in greater depth both individually and together in our commentary on the final chapter of the *Exposition*. For now, however, we will present a brief overview of the pulses attributed to the extraordinary vessels.

The majority of the pulse images described in the *Exposition* are derived from Wang Shu-He (王叔和). In describing the eight extraordinary vessel pulses, Wang's *Pulse Classic* makes use of an arcane system of pulse diagnosis known as 'The Hand Diagram of the 31 Locations' (*Shou jian tu san shi yi bu* 手檢圖三十一部). We refer to it in this text simply as the Hand Diagram. The pulses in the Hand Diagram are described in a manner that differs significantly from the standard means of pulse description. In addition to the familiar distal (*cun* 寸), middle (*guan* 關), and proximal (*chi* 尺) pulse divisions, the radial pulse is also divided longitudinally into lateral (*wai* 外), midline (*zhong* 中), and medial (*nei* 內) positions yielding a grid containing nine positions. Each position is assigned a corresponding channel. For instance, the lateral aspect of the distal position on the wrist pulse corresponds to the bladder channel and the medial aspect of the proximal position on the wrist pulse corresponds to the kidney channel (see Fig. G-1 and Table G-1).

Extraordinary vessel pulses are described in terms of their situation on this grid. In this system, extraordinary vessel pulses are distinguished from primary channel pulses in that they invariably occupy multiple grid positions. For instance, the *yang wei* pulse travels "from the [foot] lesser yin obliquely to the [foot] greater yang," covering at least three primary pulse positions.



**Fig. G-1** Pulse positions from the “Hand Diagram” of the *Pulse Classic*

	LATERAL	MIDLINE	MEDIAL
DISTAL	Bladder	Heart	Liver
MIDDLE	Stomach	Heart master	Spleen
PROXIMAL	Gallbladder	Lung/Large intestine	Kidney

**Table G-1** Channel correspondences from the “Hand Diagram” of the *Pulse Classic*

The extraordinary vessel pulse images that originated in the *Pulse Classic* have been interpreted in a variety of ways over the centuries. In an effort to make these pulses more accessible and to eliminate many of their inherent inconsistencies, subsequent commentators have progressively simplified their interpretation of this material. Such refinements have produced a much more manageable model of pulse diagnosis, although this has been achieved at the cost of ignoring some important details. Nevertheless, for readers unfamiliar with extraordinary vessel pulse diagnosis, a simplified version of the extraordinary vessel pulses is an ideal way to begin grappling with what they might actually feel like under one’s fingers. Table G-2 is such a précis. It is the interpretation of the modern extraordinary vessel pulse researcher Katsuyasu Kido, who based his material on a presentation of the extraordinary vessel pulses by Li Zhong-Zi (李中梓, 1588–1655), a contemporary of Li Shi-Zhen.<sup>1</sup>

<i>Du</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				<i>Du</i> pulse Normal pulse
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
<i>Ren</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
<i>Chong</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
<i>Dai</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
<i>Yang Qiao</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
<i>Yin Qiao</i>	DISTAL	MIDDLE	PROXIMAL	
SUPERFICIAL				
MIDDLE				
DEEP				
	<b><i>Yang Wei</i></b>			
DISTAL				
MIDDLE				
PROXIMAL				
	<b><i>Yin Wei</i></b>			
DISTAL				
MIDDLE				
PROXIMAL				

Table G-2

In the chapters that follow, it will quickly become apparent that Kido's assessment of the extraordinary vessel pulses is the product of a great deal of creative interpretation. This is a testament to the difficulty of making any practical sense of these pulses. His interpretation is far from definitive. Nevertheless, it provides an easily accessible starting point for this inquiry into the pulse images of the extraordinary vessels.

**Li Shi-Zhen's Synopsis of  
Extraordinary Vessel Pulses from  
*Pulse Studies of the Lakeside Master***

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奇經八脈	其診又別	直上直下	浮則為督	牢則為衝	緊則任脈
寸左右彈	陽蹻可決	尺左右彈	陰蹻可別	關左右彈	帶脈當訣
尺外斜上	至寸陰維	尺內斜上	至寸陽維		

The eight vessels are also diagnosed separately [from the other vessels]

[Beating] straight up and down,  
Floating is the *du* [vessel].

Confined is the *chong*  
And tense is the *ren* vessel.

Tapping in the left and right sides of the distal position,  
The yang *qiao* can be discerned.

Tapping in the left and right sides of the proximal position,  
The ~~yang~~ *qiao* can be differentiated.

Tapping in the left and right sides of the middle position,  
The *dai* should be discerned.

From the lateral aspect of the proximal position ascending obliquely,  
To reach the distal position is the *yin wei*.

From the medial of the proximal position ascending obliquely,  
To reach the distal position is the *yang wei*.

## 氣口九道脈

## The Pulses of the Nine Pathways of the Qi Opening

手檢圖曰肺為五藏華蓋上以應天解理萬物主行精氣法五行應四時知五味氣口之中陰陽交會中有五部前後左右各有所主上下中央分為九道診之則知病邪所在也

The Hand Diagram [of the 31 Locations] states: “The lung is the canopy of the five viscera, analogous to heaven above, which manages the ten-thousand things, masters the movement of the essence and qi, serves as a model for the five phases, in accordance with the four seasons, and allows for the perception of the five flavors. Within the qi opening [on the wrist], the yin and yang intersect, and it is divided into five positions, front and back, left and right, [and the middle], each of which has its master. The upper, lower, and middle positions are then divided into the nine pathways. When [the pulse is] examined in this manner, one may know where the disease pathogen lies.”<sup>1</sup>

李瀕湖曰氣口一脈分為九道總統十二經並奇經八脈各出診法乃岐伯秘授黃帝之訣也扁鵲惟之獨取寸口以訣死生蓋氣口為百脈流註朝會之始故也三部雖傳而九道淪隱放奇經之脈世無人知今撰為圖並附其說於後以泄千古之秘藏云

Li Bin-Hu states: “The radial wrist pulse is divided into the nine pathways and provides an overall system, merging the 12 [primary] channels with the eight extraordinary vessels. Each [position] has its own diagnostic presentation according to Qi Bo’s secret teaching of the *Yellow Emperor’s Rhyme*. Bian Que promoted [the principle] that one need only refer to the qi opening pulse to decide whether one will die or live. The qi opening is the starting place where the hundred vessels flow and converge in the morning. Although they pass through the three [standard] positions, the nine pathways are submerged [within it]. Because nobody in the world knows the pulses for the eight extraordinary vessels, I have now decided to draw a diagram [of this pulse diagnosis system] and append an explanation after it to transmit the secrets that have remained unknown throughout the ages.”

岐伯曰前部如外者足太陽膀胱也動苦目眩頭項腰背強痛男子陰下濕癢女子少腹痛引命門陰中痛子臟閉月水不利浮為風濇為寒滑為勞熱緊宿食

Qi Bo states: “On the lateral side of the distal position is the foot greater yang bladder.<sup>2</sup> [The patient] suffers from visual dizziness and rigidity and pain in the head, neck, low back, and back. In men, the genitals will be damp and itchy. In women, there will be lesser abdominal pain radiating to the gate of vitality, genital pain, genital obstruction, and disordered menses. A floating [pulse in the anterior position] means wind, a choppy [pulse] means cold, a slippery [pulse]<sup>3</sup> means heat from exhaustion, and a tight pulse means retained food.”<sup>4</sup>

中部如外者足陽明胃也動苦頭痛面赤滑為飲浮為大便不利澀為嗜臥腸鳴不能食足脛癢

On the lateral side of the middle position is the foot yang brightness stomach. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from headache and a red face. A slippery [pulse in this position] means thin mucus, a floating [pulse] means that there is difficulty with bowel movements,<sup>5</sup> [and] a choppy [pulse] means that there is somnolence and intestinal rumbling, inability to eat, and painful obstruction of the legs and shins.

後部如外者足少陽膽也動苦腰背脰肢肢節痛浮為氣澀為風急為轉筋為勞

On the lateral side of the proximal position is the foot lesser yang gallbladder. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from pain in the low back, [mid]back, legs, thighs, and joints of the extremities. A floating [pulse in this position] means qi [stagnation],<sup>6</sup> a choppy [pulse] means wind, and an urgent [pulse] means there is twisting of the sinews and exhaustion from overwork.

前部如內者足膽陰肝也動苦少腹痛引腰大便不利男子莖中痛小便難疝氣兩丸上入女子月水不利陰中寒子戶閉少腹急

On the medial side of the distal position is the foot reversing yin liver. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from lower abdominal pain radiating to the low back and irregular bowel movements. In men, there will be pain in the penis, difficult urination, and bulging qi in both testicles that enters from above. In women, there will be disordered menstruation, a sense of cold in the vagina, vaginal obstruction, and lesser abdominal urgency.<sup>7</sup>

中部如內看足太陰脾也動苦腹滿胃中痛上管有寒食不下腰上狀如

居水中沈澀為身重足脛寒痛煩滿不能臥時咳唾有血泄利食不化

On the medial side of the middle position is the foot greater yin spleen. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from abdominal fullness and pain in the stomach, esophageal cold, an inability to get food down, and a sensation in the low back like one is standing in water. A sunken and choppy [pulse in this position] means that there is bodily heaviness and cold and pain in the feet and shins, irritability and fullness such that one is unable to lie down, episodic cough where one hacks up blood, and diarrhea with undigested food.

後部如內看足少陰腎也動苦少腹痛與心相引背痛小便淋女人月水  
來上搶心胸脅滿股裏拘急

On the medial side of the proximal position is the foot lesser yin kidney. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from lesser abdominal pain that reciprocally radiates to and from the heart, back pain, urinary dribbling. In women during menstruation, there will be a piercing sensation ascending to the chest and heart, fullness in the rib-sides, and gripping spasms inside the thigh.

前部中央直者手少陰心手太陽小腸也動苦心下堅痛腹脅急實急者  
為感忤虛者為下利腸鳴女子陰中癢痛滑為有娠

Directly on the midline of the distal position is the hand lesser yin heart and hand greater yang small intestine. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from firmness and pain below the heart, [and] abdominal and rib-side urgency. If [the pulse] is excessive and urgent, [the patient] will experience frustration. If [the pulse] is deficient, then there will be diarrhea, rumbling intestines, and itching, and women will experience itching and pain in the genitals. A slippery [pulse in this position] means pregnancy.

中部中央直中看手厥陰心主也動苦心痛面赤多喜怒食苦咽微浮苦  
悲傷恍惚澀為心下寒沉為恐怖如人將捕之狀時寒熱有血氣

Directly on the midline of the middle position is the hand reversing yin heart master. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from heart pain, a red face, frequent [excesses] of joy and anger, and food tasting bitter in the throat.<sup>8</sup> A slightly floating [pulse in this position] means that one will suffer from sadness and disorientation. A choppy [pulse] means that there will be cold below the heart. A sunken [pulse] means that there will be apprehension as if [one was] about to be arrested. Even if there are periodic chills and fever, they have [some] qi and blood.

後部中央直者手太陰肺手陽明大腸也動苦咳逆氣不得息浮為風沉  
為熱緊為胸中積熱澀為時咳血

[A pulse that is located] directly on the midline in the proximal position is the hand greater yin lung and hand yang brightness large intestine. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from cough and a counterflow of qi such that they cannot catch their breath. A floating [pulse in this position] means wind. A sunken [pulse] means heat. A tight [pulse] means that heat accumulates in the chest, and a choppy [pulse] means there will be periodic coughing of blood.<sup>9</sup>

前部橫於寸口丸丸者住脈也動苦少腹痛逆氣搶心胸拘急不得俯仰

[A pulse that is] pill-like across all of the distal positions is a *ren* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from lesser abdominal pain and counterflow qi that pierces the heart. There will be a sense of gripping urgency in the thorax that prevents forward or backward bending.

脈經曰寸口脈緊細實長下至關者任脈也動苦少腹繞臍病男子七疝  
女子瘕聚

The *Pulse Classic* states that when the radial pulse is tight, fine, excessive, and long that reaches from below [the proximal position] to the middle position, this is a *ren* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from lesser abdominal pain and periumbilical pain.<sup>10</sup> Men will suffer from the seven types of bulging, and women will suffer from accumulations and masses.

三部俱浮直上直下著督脈也動苦腰脊強痛不得俯仰大人癰小兒癩

[A pulse that is] floating in all three positions [and beats] perpendicularly up and down is a *du* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from rigidity and pain in the lumbar spine with an inability to bend forward or backward. Adults will have withdrawal, [and] children will have seizures.

三部俱牢直上直下者衝脈也苦胸中有寒疝

[A pulse that is] confined in all three positions [and beats] perpendicularly up and down is a *chong* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from cold bulging in the chest.

脈經曰脈來中央堅實徑至關者衝脈也動苦少腹痛上搶心有瘕疝遺  
溺女子絕孕

The *Pulse Classic* states that a pulse that arrives hard and excessive on the midline position to reach the middle position is a *chong* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from lower abdominal pain and piercing pain ascending to the heart with accumulations and bulging, urinary incontinence, and female infertility.

前部左右彈者陽蹻也動苦腰背痛癲癩僵僕羊鳴偏枯瘖頑痺身休強

[A pulse that is] tapping in the distal left and right positions is a *yang qiao* [pulse]. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from low back and [mid]back pain, seizures with falling down, and sheep-like bleating, hemilateral withering, recalcitrant obstruction,<sup>11</sup> and generalized rigidity.

中部左右彈者帶脈也動苦少腹痛引命門女子月事不來絕繼復下令  
人無子男子少腹拘急或失精也

[A pulse that is] tapping in the middle left and right positions is a *dai* pulse. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers lesser abdominal pain radiating to the gate of vitality. In women, the menses are absent or cease and resume again, rendering them infertile.<sup>12</sup> In men, there is hypertonicity in the lesser abdomen and perhaps loss of semen.

後部左右彈者陰蹻也動苦癲癩寒熱皮膚強痺少腹痛里急腰胯相連  
痛男子陰疝女子漏下不止

[A pulse that is] tapping in the proximal left and right positions is a *yin qiao* [pulse]. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from seizures and falling down, fever and chills, stiffness and insensitivity of the skin, lesser abdominal pain, abdominal urgency, [and pain] that links the low back to the groin.<sup>13</sup> In males, there is yin bulging,<sup>14</sup> and in females, there is unremitting spotting.<sup>15</sup>

從少陰斜至太陽者陽維也動苦顛仆羊鳴手足相引甚者失音不能言  
肌肉癢癢

[A pulse] that goes obliquely from the [foot] lesser yin to the [foot] greater yang is a *yang wei* [pulse]. [The patient] tends to fall down with sheep-like bleating and draws up their hands and feet. In extreme cases, there will be loss of voice with an inability to speak and obstruction and itching of the muscles and flesh.

從少陽斜至厥陰者陰維也動苦癲癩僵仆羊鳴失音肌肉癢癢汗出惡  
風

From the [foot] lesser yang obliquely to the [foot] reversing yin is a *yin wei* [pulse]. [When the pulse is] perturbed in this way, [the patient] suffers from seizures with sudden collapse, sheep-like bleating, loss of voice, [and] obstruction and itching of the muscles and flesh.<sup>16</sup> There will be sweating with an aversion to wind.

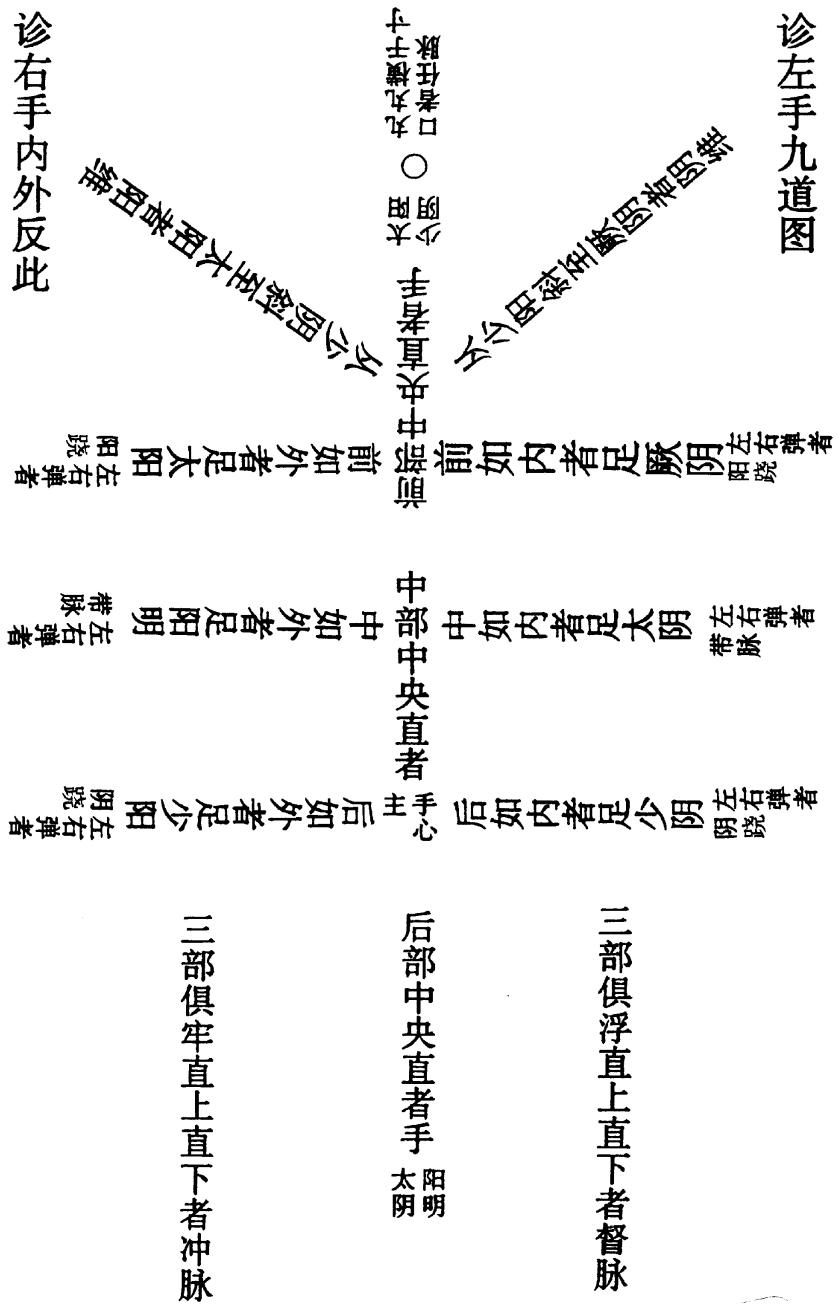


Fig. 17-1 The Hand Diagram