

Extraordinary Meridians –

Part 2: The Dance of Qi as a Mirror for the Shiatsu Practitioner

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Through her writing and practice, she is dedicated to creating flow, touching hearts, and supporting others in reconnecting with their true selves.
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In the previous article, we outlined the theoretical background of the Eight Extraordinary Meridians: their origins, functions, and place within practice. In this article, the focus shifts from theory to direct, embodied experience. Using the metaphor of a dance, we explore how Qi moves through the Extraordinary Meridians, how this movement informs Shiatsu practice, and how self-reflection strengthens the practitioner's presence and sense of rhythm.

To establish a clear point of departure, the following overview revisits the Eight Extraordinary Meridians, this time offering a glimpse into their dynamic role within the dance of Qi:

- Chong Mai, the core meridian, forms the blueprint of life.
- Ren Mai expresses Yin orientation, the melodic line of the dance.
- Du Mai embodies Yang orientation, rhythm, and strength.
- Dai Mai provides horizontal connection and containment.
- Yin Qiao Mai represents inward movement and introspection.
- Yang Qiao Mai expresses outward movement and engagement.
- Yin Wei Mai integrates emotional experience and meaning.
- Yang Wei Mai coordinates, directs, and maintains overview.

The Extraordinary Meridians as the Choreography of Life

To deepen our understanding of the Eight Extraordinary Meridians, we may envision them as eight unique performers within a choreography of Qi. Each meridian carries its own role, energy, and rhythm — and together they form a vibrant and harmonious whole. Below, we meet the eight "performers" and their specific contributions to this dance of Qi.

Chong Mai – The Choreographer / Primordial Mother of the Dance

The Chong Mai writes the script of the entire performance. It forms the blueprint of life itself, determining rhythm, themes, and underlying tone.

- Function: Creates the setting of the pulse; the deep heartbeat from which all movement arises.
- Energetic quality: Rising and descending, much like emotional waves.

- Archetype: The source, the builder, the deep ancestral mother.
- Personality: Quiet, wise, carrying ancestral memory; builds structure and direction; may feel overwhelming when out of balance.

In the dance: Chong Mai provides Yin Qiao Mai and Yang Qiao Mai with their inner motivation. Without it, the dancers do not know why they are dancing.

Voice of the meridian:

"I am the origin of your life's path. I am the blueprint. Dance from your source."

Ren Mai – The Conductor of the Yin Orchestra
Ren Mai offers the melody upon which the dancer moves: flowing, warm, and supportive.

- Function: Creates the harmonic foundation, the gentle wave on which movement rests.
- In the dance: Supports the gliding movements and introspective moments of Yin Qiao Mai.
- Archetype: Sacred feminine energy.
- Personality: Nurturing, soothing, receptive; fosters attachment, intimacy, and connection; regulates reproduction and emotional flow.

Voice of the meridian:

"Come, I will hold you. Feel the music within yourself."

Du Mai – The Conductor of the Yang Orchestra
Du Mai provides rhythm, pulse, and strength – the percussion of the dance.

- Function: Vertical axis of strength; grounds and focuses Yang Qiao Mai.
- In the dance: Gives Yang Qiao Mai stability, direction, propulsion, and guidance.
- Archetype: The inner spine.
- Personality: Courageous, active, direct; represents Yang, authority, and clarity; nourishes the brain and sensory organs; protects against collapse.

Voice of the meridian:

"Stand upright. Move forward. This is the way."

Dai Mai – The Costume Director

Dai Mai holds everything together.

- Function: Binds the "costume" around the waist; ensures that the dance does not become chaotic and that the story remains coherent.
- In the dance: Determines when Yin and Yang meet, cross, or disengage.
- Archetype: Guardian of balance.
- Personality: Organises chaos, conserves energy by bundling patterns, regulates excess.

Voice of the meridian:

"Wait... first bring order, then continue. Hold the whole together."



Yang Qiao Mai and Yin Qiao Mai – The Dancer and the Danceress

Yang Qiao Mai – The Dancer (Outward-Moving Energy):

- Role: Expressive, powerful, outward-oriented; the first step in the choreography.
- Movement: Leaps, turns, crossing lines, rapid transitions.
- Quality: Dynamic, sharp, alert; leads lateral movement and quick responses.
- Archetype: Mobility, action, initiative.
- Personality: Playful, active, exploratory.

Voice of the meridian:

“Follow me outward into movement; I guide your steps, leaps, and turns.”

Yin Qiao Mai – The Danceress (Inward-Moving Energy):

- Role: Soft, flowing, introspective; embodies the inner movement of the dance.
- Movement: Gliding, continuous lines; sustained postures; breath as rhythm.
- Quality: Introspective and refined; regulates the rhythm between rest and movement; supports sleep and reflection.
- Archetype: Balance within oneself.
- Personality: Connects inner world and rest; guards the boundary between inside and outside.

Voice of the meridian:

“Come inward; here form takes shape. Turn within and find your line. Listen to yourself.”

Yin Wei Mai – The Weaver of Stories

Yin Wei Mai weaves the narrative of the dance.

- Function: Brings experiences, emotions, and memories to the surface; connects moment to moment so the dance acquires depth and meaning.
- In the dance: Accompanies moments of inward turning, revealing the emotional depth of the choreography.
- Archetype: Integration of Yin experiences and emotions.
- Personality: Connects experiences, feeling, and meaning; continually asks “why”; links past and present; regulates desire, identity, and emotional depth.

Voice of the meridian:

“What you feel matters. This is what it means.”

Yang Wei Mai – The Director / Coordinator

Yang Wei Mai maintains the overview.

- Function: Perceives where the dance is heading; coordinates timing, contact, and interaction; integrates all Yang forces into a coherent movement.
- In the dance: The unseen force behind the dancer, allowing Yang Qiao Mai to know when to step forward, turn, lead, or follow.
- Archetype: Integration of all Yang information.
- Personality: Oversees complexity; links external stimuli, plans, and ideas; coordinates action across all Yang meridians; enables strategy, planning, and responsive action.

Voice of the meridian:

“This is the direction. This is the most appropriate route. Follow my guidance within the whole; I coordinate all forces and ensure coherence.”

The Duet: The Dance of Balance

Together, Yin Qiao Mai and Yang Qiao Mai perform a choreography that never ceases:

- Yang Qiao moves towards action; Yin Qiao guides towards balance.
- Yang Qiao opens to the world; Yin Qiao opens to the inner realm.
- Yang Qiao engages the body to leap; Yin Qiao softens to land safely.
- Yang Qiao perceives opportunity; Yin Qiao perceives meaning and brings clarity.

In classical Chinese medicine, they work together to regulate the opening and closing of the eyes, both literally and metaphorically. They govern lateral movement, balance, and posture, and determine whether movement is directed outward or inward.

Their duet mirrors the dance of life itself: how do you move through the world, and how do you return to yourself?

The Extraordinary Meridians as a Mirror for Self-Reflection in Shiatsu Practice

"When giving Shiatsu, it is helpful to see the experience as a dance between two people, rather than as a process in which an active therapist applies pressure with their fingers to a passive patient. The Shiatsu practitioner uses their whole body as a lever to give support and pressure; and the receiver is far from a motionless object, but rather a source of subtle movement to which the practitioner attunes, and which provides support and counterbalance for the practitioner's movements."

— Carola Beresford-Cooke,
Shiatsu: Theory and Practice (2016)

When working with the Extraordinary Meridians, the Shiatsu practitioner can use this dance as a guiding metaphor to reflect on posture, intention, and energetic presence. Each meridian offers a distinct level of self-inquiry and awareness.

Yin Qiao Mai – Stability from within

- Self-reflection: How graceful and fluid is my own movement? Do I sense my internal balance before touching the receiver?
- Practical observation: Notice whether your breath and weight remain stable as you follow the receiver.

Yang Qiao Mai – Balance in outward action

- Self-reflection: Can I attune rhythm, strength, and direction to the receiver without forcing?
- Observation: Notice whether your impulses synchronise with the subtle movements of the receiver's body.

Dai Mai – Horizontal integration, the "belt"

- Self-reflection: Can I offer both structure and space? Am I present as a container while remaining flexible as the receiver moves?
- Observation: Sense whether your movements remain connected across the receiver's whole body, without fragmentation.

Ren Mai – Anterior line, Yin quality

- Self-reflection: How subtle, attentive, and melodic is my touch? Do I truly listen to the receiver's rhythm and needs?

- Observation: Ask yourself, "Do I protect and support the receiver as a parent gently holding a child?"

Du Mai – Posterior line, Yang quality

- Self-reflection: How grounded, focused, and clear is my intention? Can I sense the pulse and follow it without dominating?
- Observation: Notice whether strength and direction remain consistent while maintaining your own stability.

Chong Mai – Deep core meridian

- Self-reflection: To what extent does my Shiatsu reflect my own life path and inner core? Can I remain present even when encountering difficult energies in myself or the receiver?
- Observation: Ask yourself, "Am I the stillness and wisdom required to hold space for the receiver?"

Yin Wei Mai and Yang Wei Mai – Integration and connection

- Self-reflection: How do I bring all aspects of my presence, intention, and energy into coherence? Can I integrate the experience into a harmonious flow?
- Observation: Sense whether energy flows through both your own body and that of the receiver, and whether the session feels complete as a whole.

By integrating these reflective questions and observations, working with the Extraordinary Meridians becomes not only a physical treatment, but also a practice of awareness, rhythm, balance, and connection — for both the Shiatsu practitioner and the receiver.

Final Cadence of Qi

Every touch is a step, every movement a breath.

The Extraordinary Meridians whisper the choreography of your own energy, at once gentle and powerful.

In the interplay of giving and receiving, rhythm, balance, and a sacred space for being emerge.

Thus, Shiatsu becomes not just a technique, but a living dance in which body, mind, and heart come together.