

## Diverging Traditions of Pulse Positions

### Synopsis

There are two main maps of pulse positions that have been received from traditional teachings: one found in modern TCM and one from Five Element. Diverging ideas regarding pulse positions reveal the underlying divergence between acupuncture traditions.

### Pulse Positions

There are two main traditions of Acupuncture that are used in modern practice. Aspects of these traditions can be represented by comparing the pulse positions given in various texts.

### Pulse Positions Historical

The Nei Jing describes pulses in different places on the body the 9 pulses, they were used diagnostically by comparing with each other. The pulse of the radial artery and the positions related to various locations and depths, is described in the Nan Jing. During Mediaeval times the teaching on this changed and the two ideas Classical and mediaeval have come down to modern practice.

In the Nan Jing the pulse positions were originally given in terms of the channels, this was restated in terms of the Zang-Fu organs as shown in Fig 1a and 1b.

Fig 1a. Nan Jing

		<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Cun</b>	Superficial	Hand Tai Yang	Hand Yang Ming
	Deep	Hand Shao Yin	Hand Tai Yin
<b>Guan</b>	Superficial	Foot Shao Yang	Foot Yang Ming
	Deep	Foot Jue Yin	Foot Tai Yin
<b>Chi</b>	Superficial	Foot Tai Yang	Hand Shao Yang
	Deep	Foot Shao Yin	Hand Jue Yin

Fig. 1b Mai Jing (Pulse Classic), Wang She-He (210-285 CE).

		<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Cun</b>	Superficial	Small Intestine	Large Intestine
	Deep	Heart	Lungs
<b>Guan</b>	Superficial	Gall Bladder	Stomach
	Deep	Liver	Spleen
<b>Chi</b>	Superficial	Bladder	Triple Burner
	Deep	Kidneys	Pericardium

These pulse positions continue to form the basis of the pulse diagnosis of non-TCM styles of acupuncture, especially Five Element.

Modern TCM has de-emphasized the pulse positions and with less emphasis on depth in terms of its relation to Zang-Fu. Fig.2 shows the pulse relationships given by Bob Flaws.

Fig.2 Jing Yue Quan Shu (Jing-yue's complete book) (1624) based upon Bin Hu Mai Xue.

	<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Cun</b>	Heart & Center of Chest (Dan Zhong)	Lungs and Center of Chest (Xiong Zhong)
<b>Guan</b>	Liver/gallbladder	Spleen/stomach
<b>Chi</b>	Kidney & abdomen (Bladder & S.I.)	Kidney & Abdomen (L.I.)

### **Pulse Positions and San Jiao**

The underlying structure of the pulse positions is related to the San Jiao.

In relation to the earliest attribution we can see that the most important consideration was the position of the channel in most cases.

	<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Upper Jiao</b>	Small Intestine/Heart	Lungs/Large Intestine
<b>Middle Jiao</b>	Gallbladder/Liver	Spleen/Stomach
<b>Lower Jiao</b>	Bladder/Kidney	Xin Bao Luo/San Jiao

The later attributions place greater importance on the position of the organ within the San Jiao structure. For example we can see that the SI and LI are placed in the upper Jiao position in the Classical texts, and in the lower Jiao in the Mediaeval texts. We can also see a graphic representation of the principle of Kidney as the foundation of Yin and Yang. To an extent the organs on the right are most prone to Yin deficiency and the organs on the right to Yang Deficiency. This is most marked in relation to Liver and Spleen, but of course both Heart and Lungs are prone to Yin or Yang deficiency.

	<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>
<b>Upper Jiao</b>	Heart	Lungs
<b>Middle Jiao</b>	Liver/Gallbladder	Spleen/Stomach
<b>Lower Jiao</b>	Kidney (Yin), abdomen, Bladder and Small Intestine	Kidney (Yang), and abdomen, Large Intestine.

The relative greater emphasis on herbal medicine in modern TCM could explain the greater emphasis on the organ rather than the channel.

**Pulse Positions and Five Phases**

The second main relationship that we can see between pulse positions is Five Phase. This is perhaps not so immediately apparent because the right side is reversed.

Fig 3a. Relation of pulse positions to Five Phases

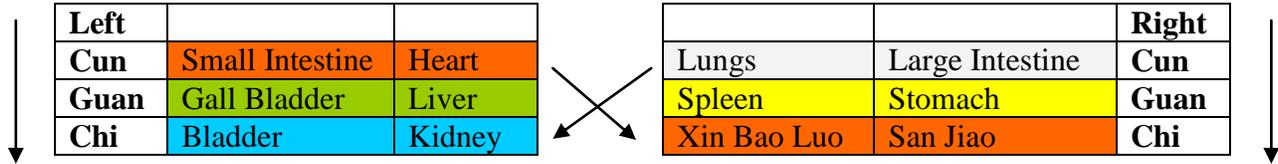
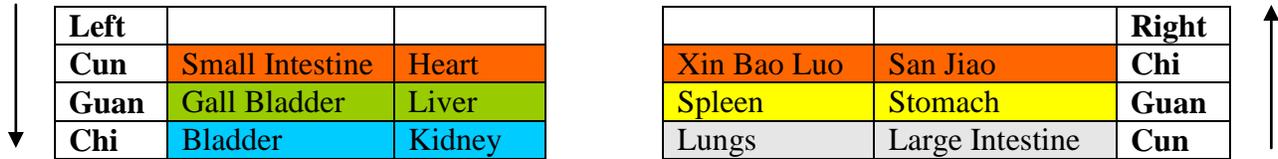


Fig 3b To relate the pulses to the Five Phases we must reverse the right side



**Depth**

It is also worth noting something that is not explicit in terms of pulse understanding. In TCM primacy is given to the Yin Organs. The underlying structure of the pulse is that deep represents Yin and surface Yang. In Zang-Fu theory the Zang or Yin Organs are primary, and the Fu or Yang Organs are generally seen as the more mundane ‘bowels’. However, in Five Element traditions the surface pulse, i.e. Yang organ represents the yang functions in general. In other words the ‘Stomach’ pulse would represent what TCM would call Spleen-Yang.

**Conclusion;**

Despite the divergences, the consistencies maintained between the two schemas are more remarkable than the discrepancies. However, we are left with the fact that the two traditions cannot be completely harmonized. We are seeing the relations between 12 (two times six), channels and Five Phases.

The underlying numerology explains that these models can never be entirely harmonized. The twelve channels are based upon a binary numerological sequence. In other words Yin/Yang are the underlying principle of all even numbers. Five Phases are an odd number.

In harmonizing the twelve channels and Five Phases the dual aspect of Fire resolves this rather simply. However harmonization of the Channels and organs is somewhat more problematic.