

**CLASSICAL PULSE DIAGNOSIS
IN CHINESE MEDICINE**

LOOK INSIDE

CLASSICAL PULSE DIAGNOSIS IN CHINESE MEDICINE

Complete Mai Jing A-B-C Pulse Method

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XV
INTRODUCTION	XVII
Part 1: Theory and Practical Teaching	1
Step A: Whole Pulse Diagnosis	3
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION TO STEP A	5
Preliminaries	6
Practical First Steps	13
CHAPTER 2	
OVERALL PULSE METHOD – A1	25
Excess and Deficiency	26
Any Overall Qualities	35
CHAPTER 3	
THREE JIAO METHOD – A2	41
Three Burners	41
Practical Method	45
Method Significance	47
CHAPTER 4	
THREE LAYERS – A3	53
<i>Wei Qi, Ying Qi, Jing</i>	53
Practical Method	57
CHAPTER 5	
REVIEW OF STEP A	65
Step B: The Eight Extras Diagnosis	71
CHAPTER 6	
INTRODUCTION TO STEP B	73

CHAPTER 7	
THREE EXTRAS – B1	87
<i>Du, Ren and Chong Mai</i>	87
Practical Method	90
Classical Source	95
CHAPTER 8	
FIVE MOVEMENTS – B2	109
<i>Qiao Mai, Wei Mai, Dai Mai</i>	109
Classical Source	110
Practical Method	122
CHAPTER 9	
NINE PATHWAYS – B3	135
Luo-Collaterals	135
Practical Method	145
CHAPTER 10	
STEP B REVIEW	165
Step C: Zang-Fu Diagnosis	173
CHAPTER 11	
INTRODUCTION TO STEP C	175
Classical Sources	176
CHAPTER 12	
FIVE LEVEL METHOD – C1	179
Five <i>Zang</i> Organs	179
Classical Source 1	192
Classical Source 2	195
CHAPTER 13	
24 QI METHOD – C2	219
The 12 <i>Zang</i> and <i>Fu</i> organs	219
Classical Source 1	221
Classical Source 2	235
Practical Method	238

CHAPTER 14	
24 QUALITIES METHOD – C3	251
Qi and Substances	251
Classical Source	254
Practical Method	263
CHAPTER 15	
REVIEW OF STEP C	269
Part 2: A-B-C Method in Practice and Qualities	277
CHAPTER 16	
METHOD REVIEW	279
Synthesis	282
Integration	286
CHAPTER 17	
CASE STUDIES	291
CHAPTER 18	
DEEP DIVE INTO QUALITIES 1	301
<i>Mai Jue</i>	303
The Genius of Li Shi-Zhen	313
CHAPTER 19	
PULSE MONOGRAPHS	325
Lakeside Master Pulse Study	325
CHAPTER 20	
DEEP DIVE INTO QUALITIES 2	381
Review of Monographs	381
Return to the Whole Pulse	385
CHAPTER 21	
CONCLUSION	395
Returning to Oneness	395
APPENDIX: MAI JING 24 + TERMS	399
REFERENCES	401
ENDNOTES	403
INDEX	407

TABLE OF TRANSLATIONS

<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 1, Chapter 10	31
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 1, Chapter 3	43
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 1, Chapter 5	44
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 3	50
<i>Nan Jing</i> Difficulty 4	56
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 4, Line 11	96
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 4, Line 13	97
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 4, Line 16	99
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 10, Eight Extraordinary Vessel Section	110
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 10, Eight Extraordinary Vessel Section	117
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 10, Line 2	141
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 10, Line 2, 9 Pulse Position Section	146
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 1, Chapter 7 (First Part)	177
<i>Nan Jing</i> Difficulty 4	192
<i>Nan Jing</i> Difficulty 5	195
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 5, Chapter 1	219
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 1, Line 17	223
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 1, Line 18	224
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 1, Line 19	225
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 1, Line 20	226
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 1 (First Part of Each Line)	228
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 2, Chapter 2, Lines 26–31, First Part	235
<i>Su Wen</i> 8 (Lines relating to <i>zang</i> and <i>fu</i>)	245
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 1, Chapter 1, Lines 1 – 24	254
<i>Mai Jue</i> Lines 1 to 22	304
<i>The Errors of the Seven Exterior, Eight Interior, and Nine Ways</i>	317
<i>Binhu Maixue – Lakeside Master Pulse Study</i>	326
<i>Mai Jing</i> Book 4, Chapter 8	387
<i>Mai Jue</i> Line 22 (last part)	396

STEP B: THE EIGHT EXTRAS DIAGNOSIS

Now in Step B, we start to focus more on the actual anatomical structure of the artery. We become aware of the sides of the pulse, and the shape that it can make in the pulse space as it travels towards the wrist.

The *Eight Extras Diagnosis* brings out diagnostic information for the extraordinary vessels and the luo-collaterals. It is both accurate and relatively easy to do, and brings out excellent quality information for the clinic. These are responsive pulse signs in that they change in reply to treatment during the session, providing very good feedback to the practitioner as to the effectiveness of treatment planning and point selection.

In Step B we now enter an entirely new set of methods and quite detailed theory to inform the next Sub-Steps: B1, B2 and B3. Step B frequently is involved with conditions that often have a very physical manifestation.

It also very commonly comes into play with long-term conditions, especially those that involve long-term mental-emotional states, trauma or deep fatigue. It diagnoses the state of the eight extraordinary vessels (abbreviated to 8EV) in Sub-Steps **B1** and **B2**. Then, in **B3**, the Nine Pathways Method, we move on to a subtle, but very powerful view of the luo-collaterals.

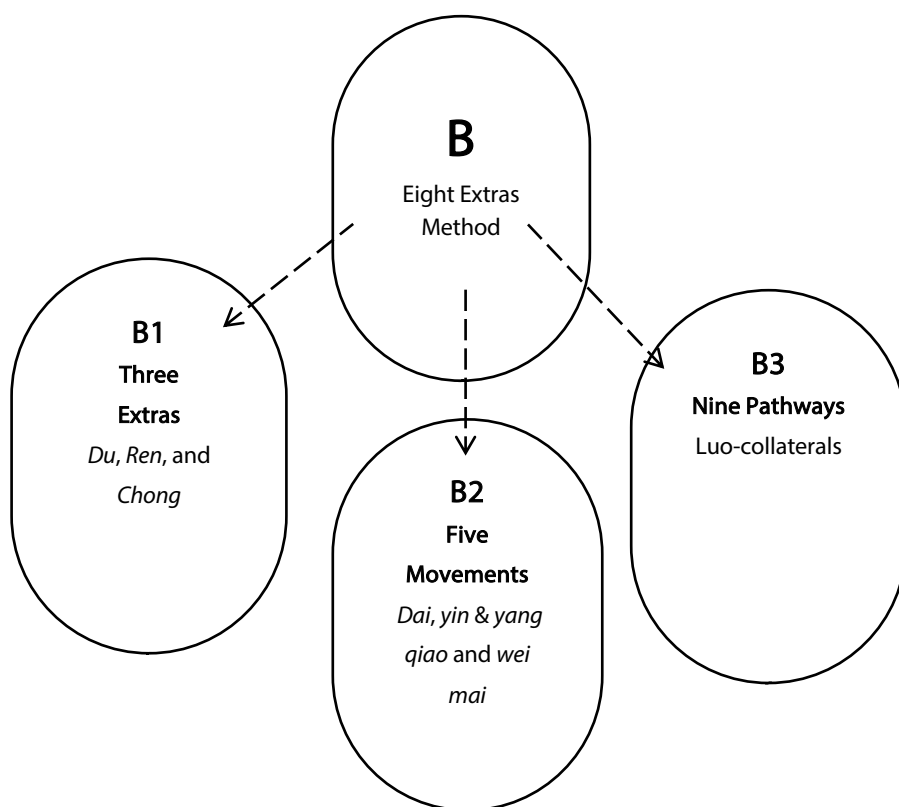


Figure 17
Step B, Overview

Push, Pull, Settle

This is a kind of rocking motion of the fingers, hand and arm that is quite satisfying to practise. This movement is crucial for mastering Sub-Steps B2 and B3, but it is also used in Sub-Step B1 to locate the high point of the artery prior to the vertical palpation downwards.

In fact it can be used at any point in pulse diagnosis to find and feel the actual radial artery. If you feel that you cannot feel any pulse at all, try doing this first and it may well come to you.

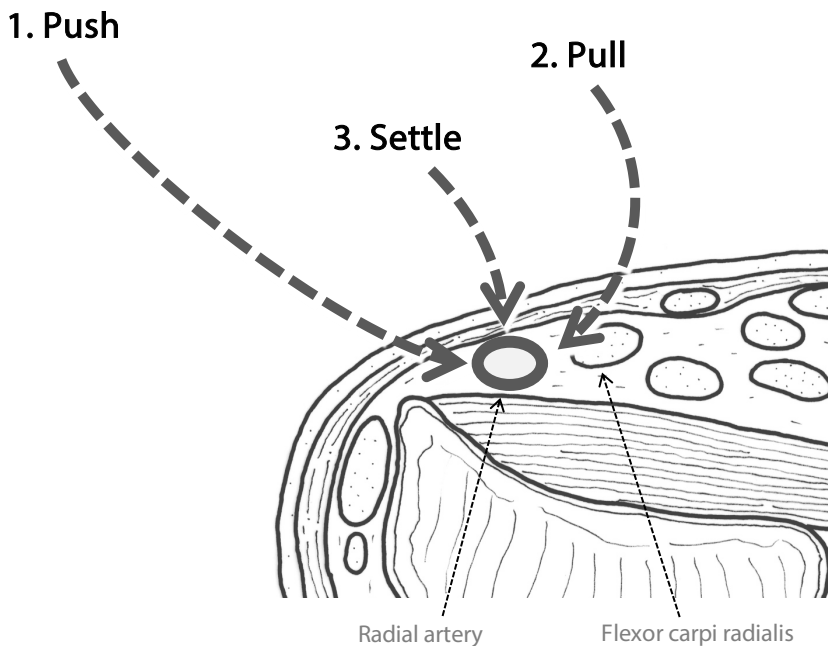


Figure 18

The Push, Pull, Settle movement to locate and feel the radial artery

Note the close proximity of the tendon of flexor carpi radialis to the artery. Sometimes this means we must first consciously move the palpating fingers down between artery and tendon before we can pull.

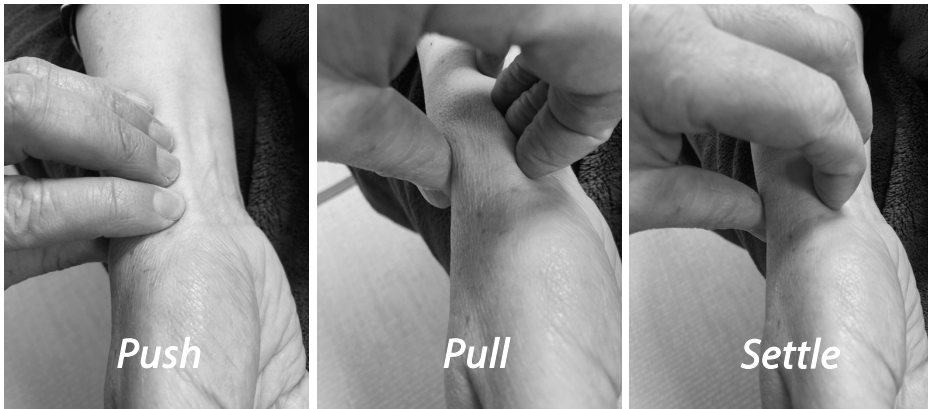


Figure 19
The three movements of Push, Pull and Settle

This Push, Pull, Settle movement is the technique that allows the sensing of the sides of the pulse, which then brings out the diagnostic features on these different planes as we go through the step. As an alternative, we may repeat the “push and pull” part of this method for a bit until we become clear about the location and shape of the artery before settling on the high part. The exact meaning of a “side” of the artery is perhaps open to debate. But if we temporarily imagine flattening the artery into more of a square shape then we can start to imagine the sides better.

« MOVEMENT REVIEW »

So there are three parts to it: Push, pull, settle. So that's the simplest way of doing it. Then there are some varieties. You can also push with little pulses like this:

“Push, push, push. Lift, hook. Pull, pull, pull. And settling on the top.”

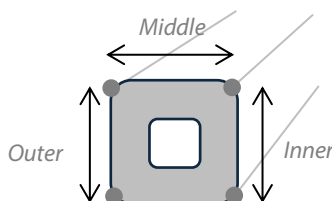
So you can do it in a fluid way, pushing and pulling, because you need to have a sense that there's actually something there underneath your fingers.

Sides of the Pulse

In essence you imagine that the artery has “corners” (as indicated by the dots below) and you then feel the sides between the corners. In reality we may actually palpate only the upper part of the side of the artery (this is especially the case with the inner – ulnar side, done after hooking into and pulling) but have to use our imagination to “feel into” the sides with our mind’s eye.

We can imagine now that the artery has two sides plus the top, making three “faces” of the artery that we can palpate. These three faces, over three pulse positions make nine separate locations that can be assessed. Note that these nine are therefore all located on one hand, and as we will see, we can do this procedure on both hands, meaning eventually that Step B has 18 separate pulse locations for assessment. More on that later!

Imagine flattening the
artery
into more of a square
shape



... then in your mind's
eye let the square
shape go back to
round

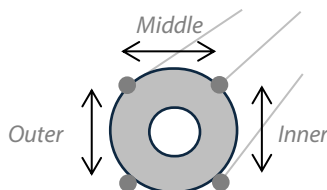


Figure 20
Visualization for “sides” of the pulse

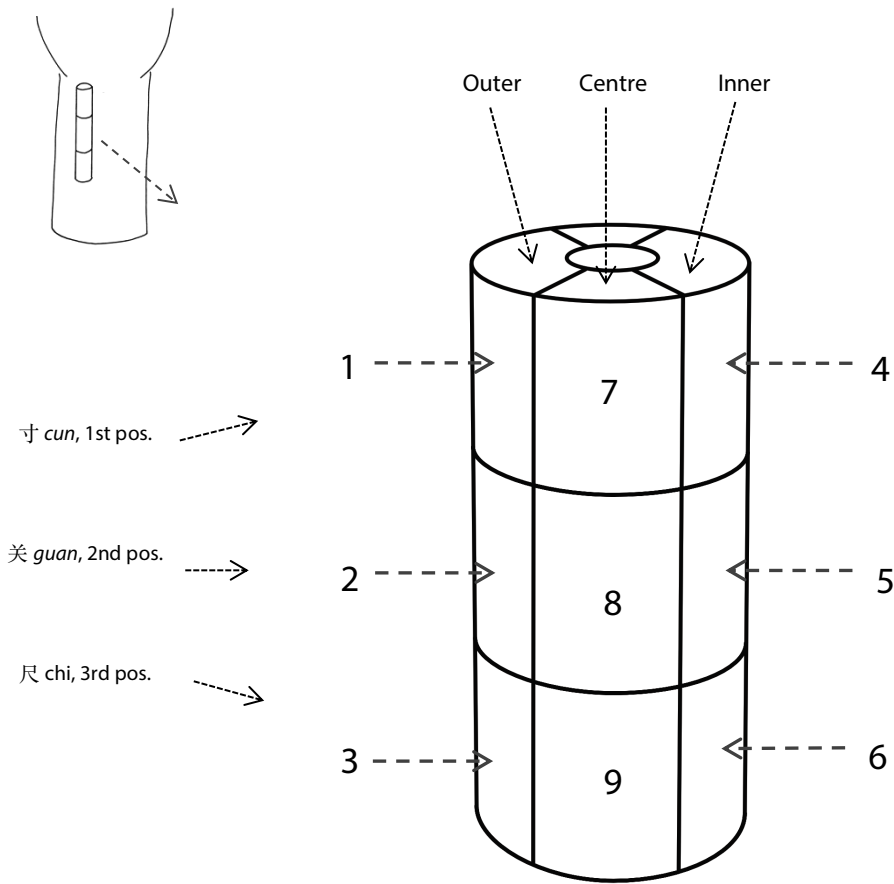


Figure 21
Nine Pushes

*Stylised radial artery showing nine directions of pushing. [Left-hand view]
The order of palpation is best thought of as three vertical series of three places of pulse reading, each going from the distal to proximal position. The numbers indicate the order of palpation.*

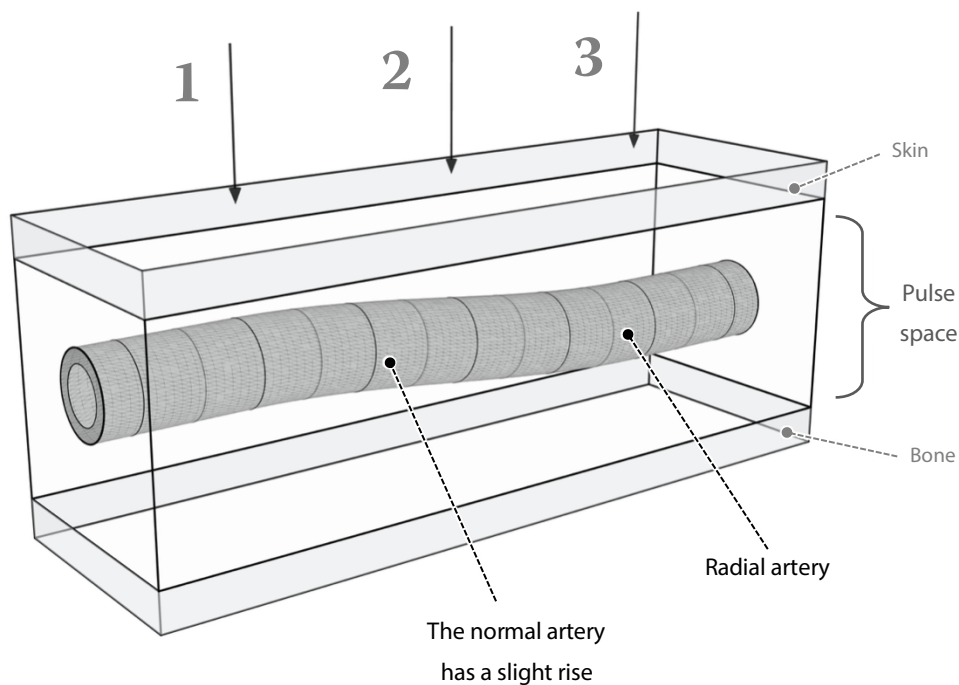


Figure 22

Normal (neutral) pulse alignment (left hand, proximal direction view)

Before the process of visualising the extraordinary pulses, we need to become familiar with the above 'neutral' pulse position; neither high nor low. Notice in addition that the artery has a very slight rise, from proximal (elbow direction) to distal (wrist direction). In other words, going to the left on this diagram we see a slight rise. This is a normal shape in health.

The Three Extras Method (B1) involves finding the highest point of the artery, followed by a vertical palpation in a similar manner to the last part, A3, the Three Layers Method. However in the B1 method we need to be more accurate about finding this uppermost place on the artery. This is achieved by doing the Push, Pull, Settle movement as described in Chapter 6. This will generate, in our mind's eye, a sense of the direct position of the artery in three dimensions. Now based on that, we carefully allow our fingers to settle again on the high point of the artery, the three fingers acting together in movement as one.

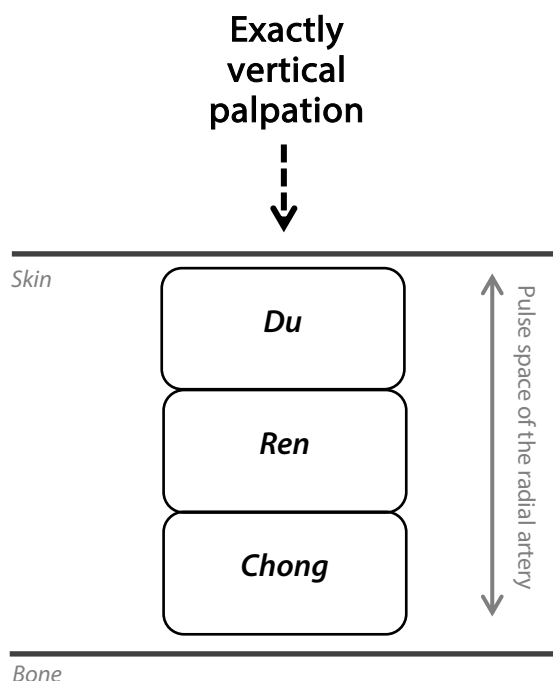


Figure 23

Practical Method of B1

First push, pull, settle, then do exactly vertical palpation to find the relative depths of du, ren and chong

With the fingers on the summit of the radial pulse slowly and accurately penetrate exactly vertically downwards, moving the fingers together, with equal pressure applied to each finger (so that the fingertips are totally level).

In the first layer of the pulse space, we find an area that corresponds to the *du* channel. Pushing further we find the area (midway) corresponding to the *ren* channel, then pushing further towards the bone we find the area for the *chong*. *Only if there is an active imbalance that needs treating* will there be an unusual manifestation of the pulse at one of these layers.

The *Mai Jing*, in the Blue Poppy translation, describes the artery “beating upwards” when one of these channels is affected to the point of needing treatment, which is a useful image.³⁹

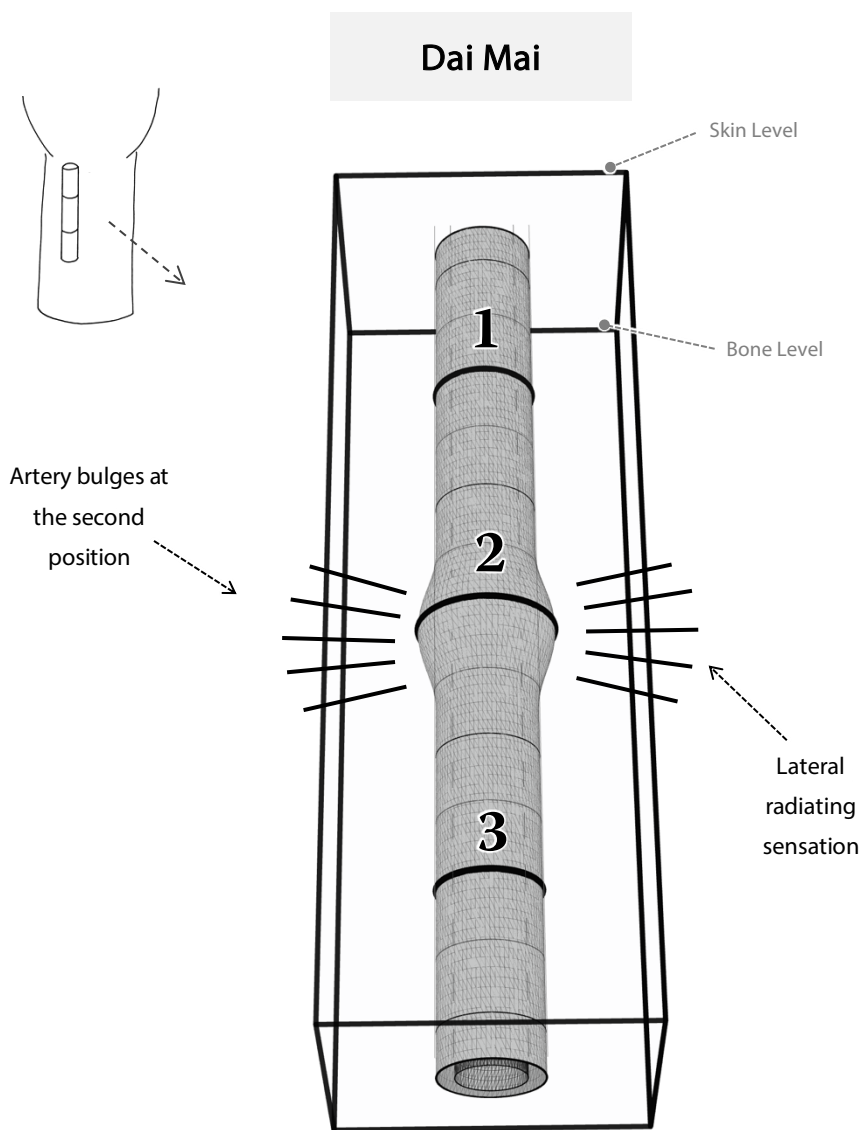


Figure 31
Dai mai view in distal direction, second position bulge and radiating sensation
I have drawn a bulge: when a dai mai presentation is at its clearest this is exactly how it is.

This image really is what the artery feels like. The main sensation in the middle position is of a strong fizzing laterally onto the fingertips.

For notation, we use a grid-like concept of the Nine Pushes that was introduced in Chapter 6 by drawing, for each hand, three parallel lines that represent

Here, unlike the *du*, *ren* and *chong* movements being exactly vertically up and down, we use the pushing and pulling movement to search out and feel the artery in its complete form and shape. Notice there is nothing here to do with qualities apart from the strong, rebounding, lateral quality that we link here with the word *tan*. Actually I would not even use the word quality for *tan*... it is more of a state or condition as it has an obvious movement associated with it.

Now we can move on to how the *yin* and *yang wei mai* show themselves. Unlike the previous three EVs, these vessels do not have a bulge in them, but instead show what I could term a “swing” across the pulse space. These are very distinctive findings. As an example of these two, here is a *yang wei mai* pulse:

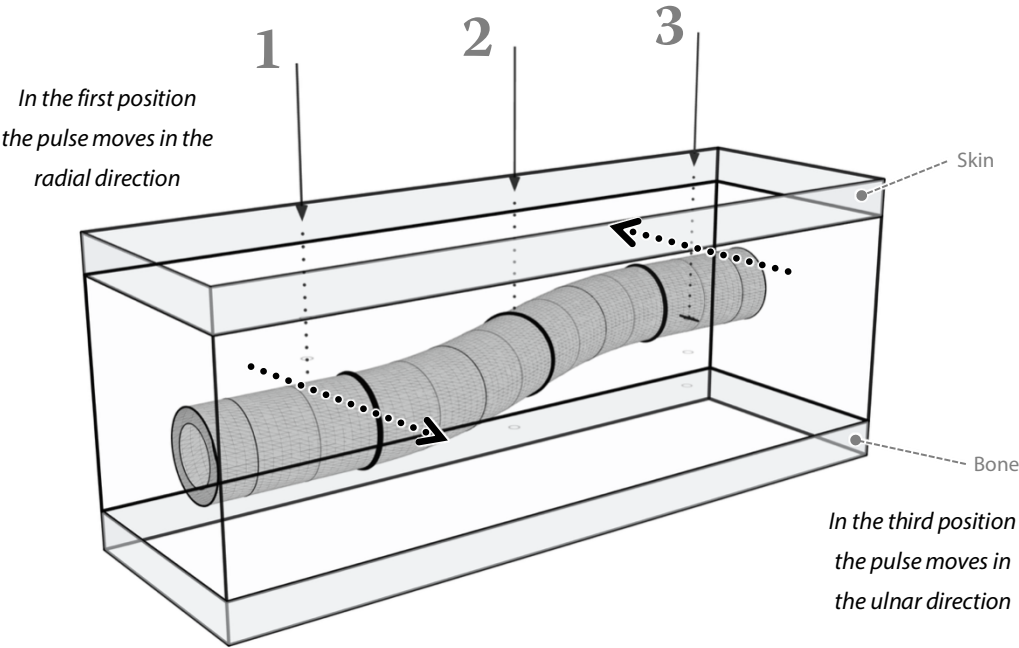


Figure 35
Yang wei mai (left hand), view in proximal direction
With characteristic “swing” across the pulse space. The artery really is shaped like this.

- We see the stomach and spleen occupying the middle *guan* position, which is the same as where these organs/channels are found in conventional diagnosis.
- Gallbladder is found diagonally opposite to its yin-yang pair, liver.
- Bladder is also found diagonally opposite to kidney.

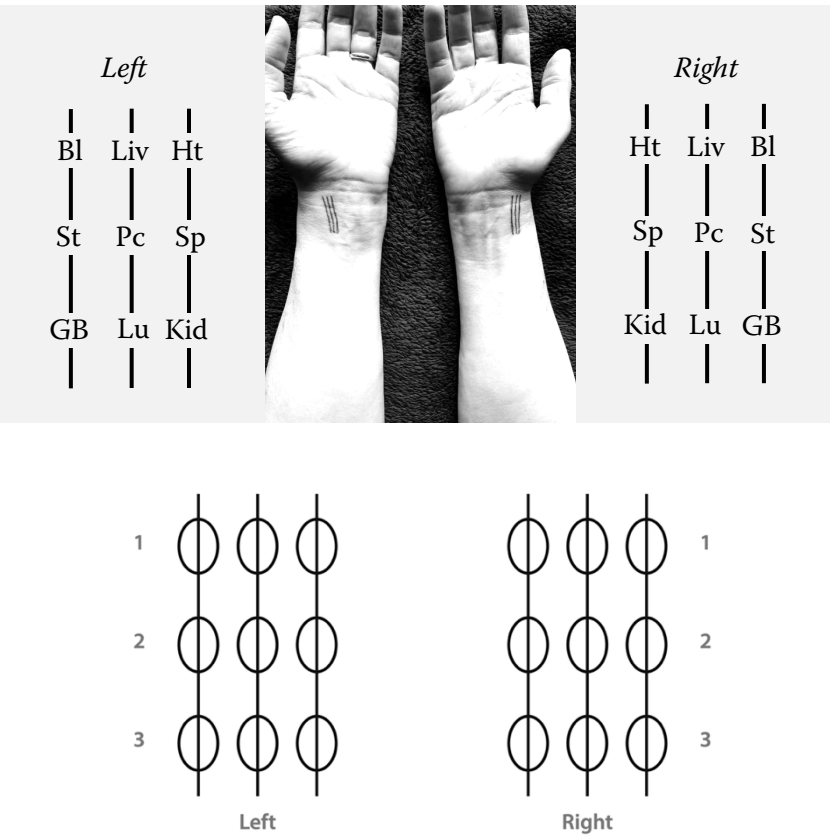


Figure 46

Bilateral views of correspondences, with blank notation grid

The top of the set of lines is equivalent to the proximal border of the scaphoid bone. Photo shows the same lines drawn over the three pulse positions of the radial artery on both hands.

If a finding is felt on any position, it can be notated on the blank grid shown above. Once learned, there is no need to have the channel correspondences written out.

For either side the order of the palpation of pulse positions will be the same:

STEP C: ZANG-FU DIAGNOSIS

In many ways, with already balanced and healthy individuals, Step C is likely to bring out the most information that leads to treatment protocols. It includes what I think of as a high point of the A-B-C Method: the Five Level Method (C1). This is exceptionally useful in uncovering imbalances among the five *zang* (yin) organs. These imbalances include what we can call “elemental factors” and may be usefully thought of as imbalances in the emotional world or psyche of the patient. This then builds up with a picture of the state of the *fu* (yang) organs (C2), then to conclude we let qualities arise on any of the six standard pulse positions (C3).

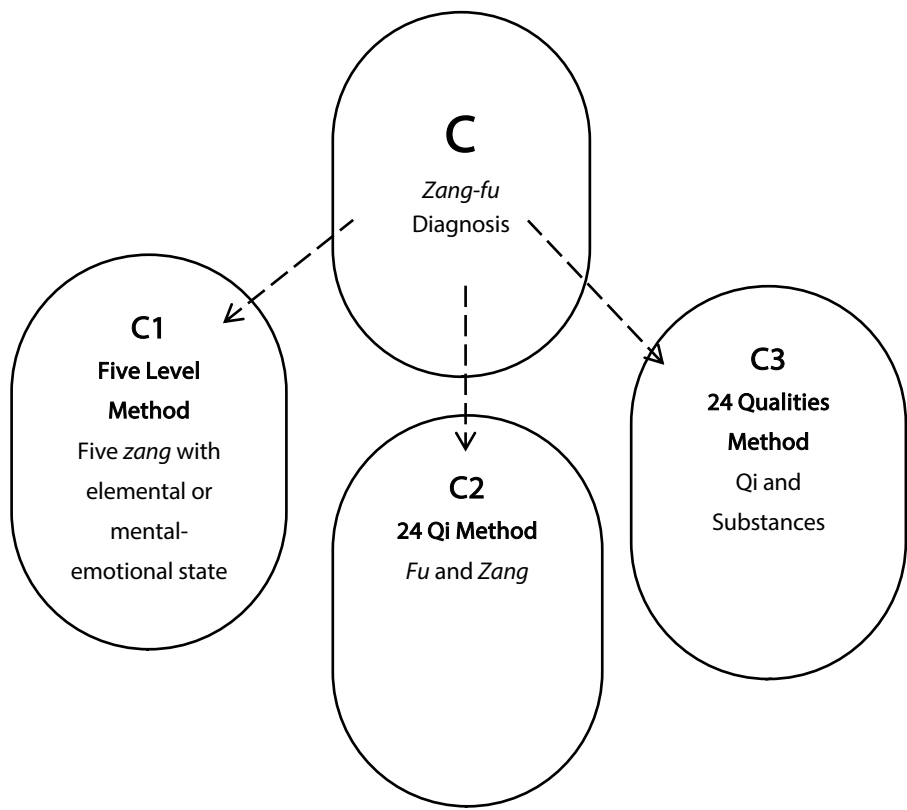


Figure 57
Step C overview

Classical Sources

There are two main sources for the Step C method as a whole, both from the *Mai Jing*. These are Book 1, Chapter 6 – relating to the Five Levels and Book 1, Chapter 7. These writings are in the early stages of the *Mai Jing*, where the outline of the meaning of areas of pulse, levels and positions are being established.

It is interesting that these come one after the other in the text and I think they show complementary views of the pulse picture: the one relating to levels (Book 1, Chapter 6) and the other relating to the six positions (Book 1, Chapter

Anatomy and the Rising Radial Artery

Before we embark on the journey of understanding the details of this method, we need to understand an important point. In a state of health the artery should make a gentle rise as it moves from the *chi* position towards the *cun*. In general terms the artery is just above the bone at the *chi* position, then it rises to just below the skin at the *cun* position. The *guan* level is found midway between the two.

When a person is perfectly balanced the artery should move up with this slope, and it is not, as most illustrations show it, lying in a straight line. In actuality this slope is slight, but it definitely can be felt. The arteries at both wrists are similar, with the exception that the right artery sits a little higher than the left in the *cun* and *guan*.

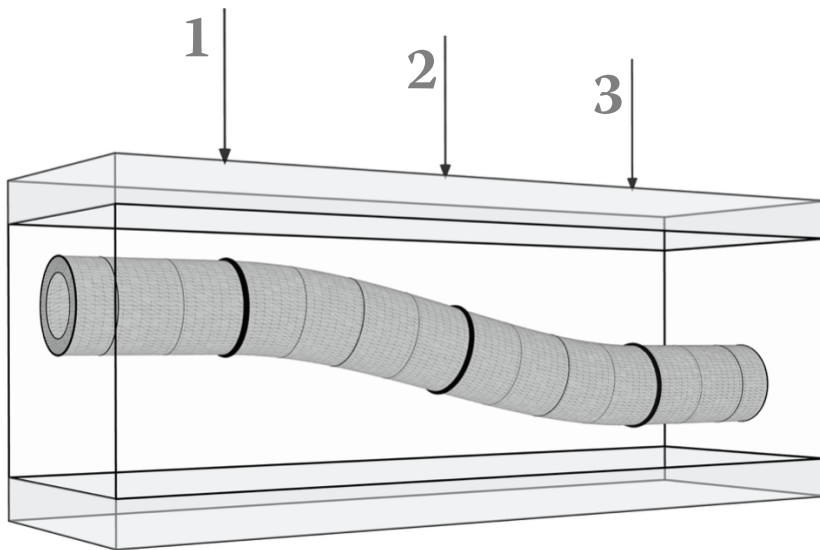


Figure 58

The rising radial artery in a state of health

The artery has a natural rise from proximal (right end) to distal (left). Knowing this from the outset can help us visualise the depths of the artery in each position.

- 1. The level of the lung is said to be quite superficial, just under the outer layer of skin and hair. It is described as being found with the pressure of the finger being equivalent to the weight of three soybeans.
- 2. Heart is a little deeper at six soybeans.
- 3. Spleen deeper still at nine soybeans.
- 4. Liver is equivalent to twelve soybeans.
- 5. Kidney is found in the deepest position, just above the bone.

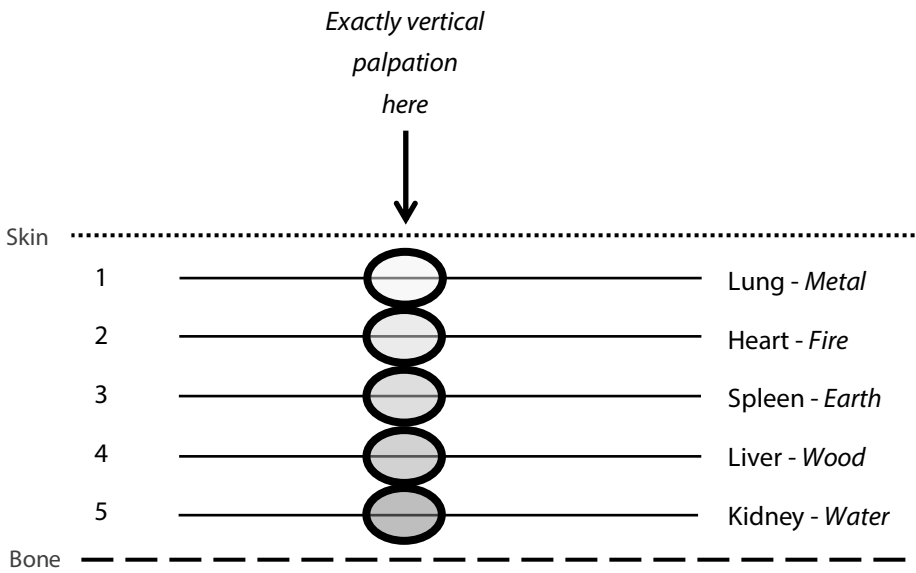


Figure 59
The five pulse levels of the radial artery

This is as it might appear in the space between skin and bone for any one pulse position. These five levels go from just under the skin to just above the bone. The diagram shows shading of shapes indicating depth.

This description illustrates quite graphically the actual weight of pressure needed to push the fingertips downwards. The figure above shows these five theoretical levels of the pulse space with equivalent organs and elements.

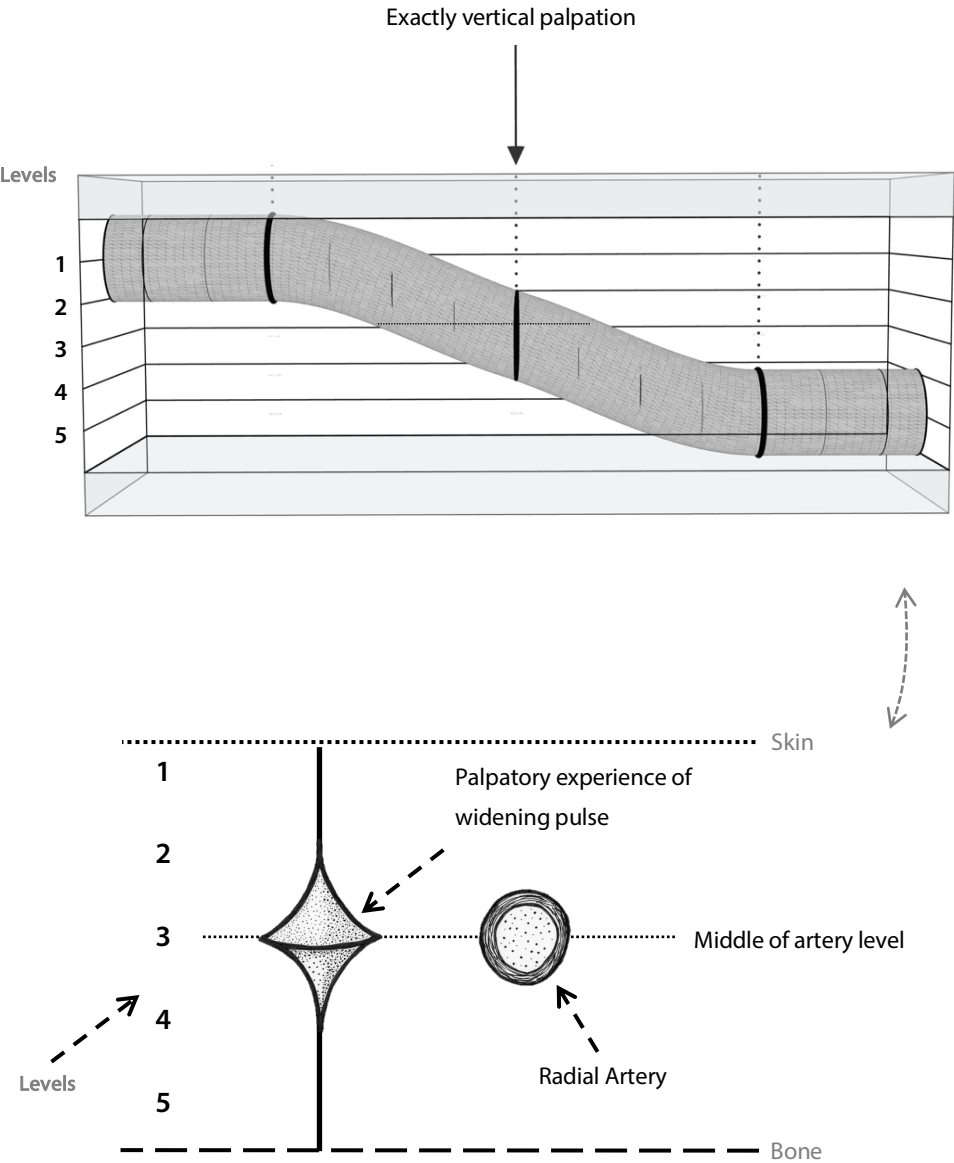


Figure 60

The characteristic spindle shape of the perception of the widening artery
When palpating at the second position on the right hand (the normal position for the spleen organ), the artery is found at the third level (midway between skin and bone). This is experienced as a widening sensation like coming down onto a spindle shape.

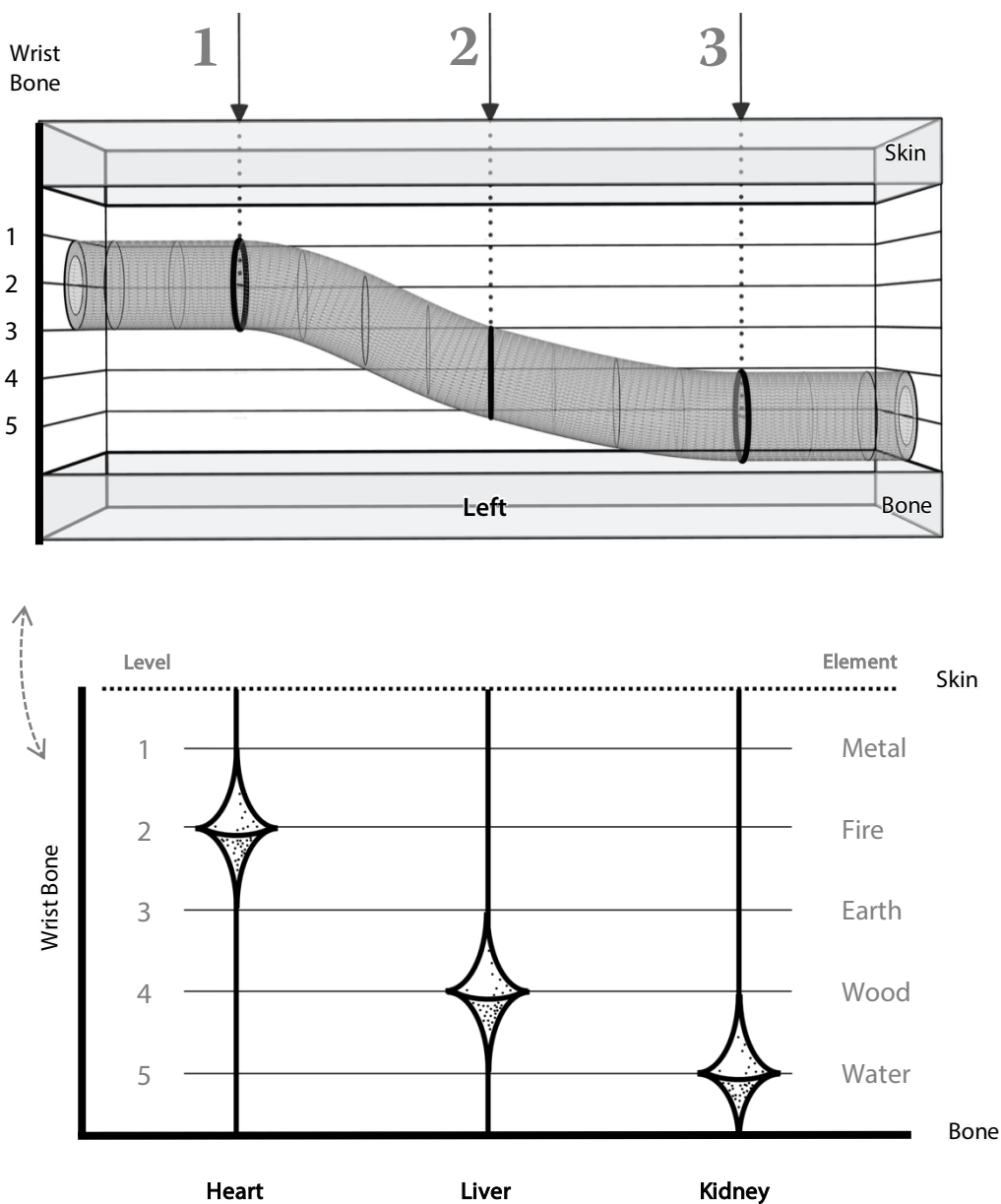


Figure 61

Ideal felt shapes and depths of pulses for the left hand

From skin level (dotted line) to bone level (solid bold line). Cun: heart at 2nd level (fire), guan: liver at 4th level (wood), chi: kidney at 5th level (water). Distal direction to left (towards wrist) and proximal direction to right.

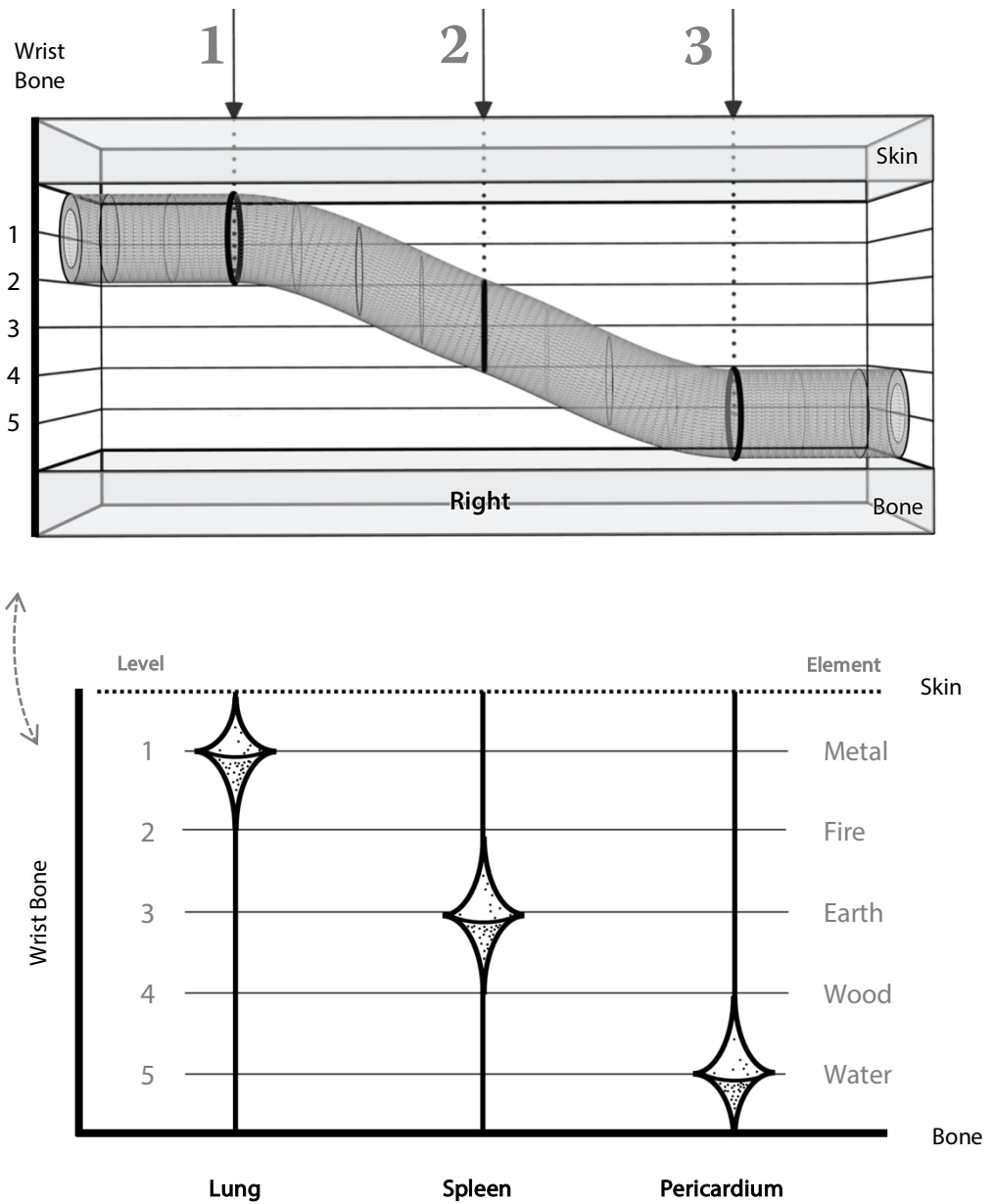


Figure 62

Ideal felt shapes and depths of pulses for the right hand
from skin level (dotted line) to bone level (solid bold line). Cun: lung at 1st level (metal), guan: spleen at 3rd level (earth), chi: pericardium at 5th level (mingmen). Distal direction to left, proximal to right.

Five-Level Notation

To notate the five levels, the A-B-C system uses a grid based on the spindle shapes we introduced above. It uses the same idea of the shape of the rising artery from *chi* to *cun* from the previous two figures. These grids are then laid out one above the other. At the start of using this method it is recommended to use the following sort of diagram as a matrix. The diamond shapes correspond to the spindle shapes of the widening perception of pulse.

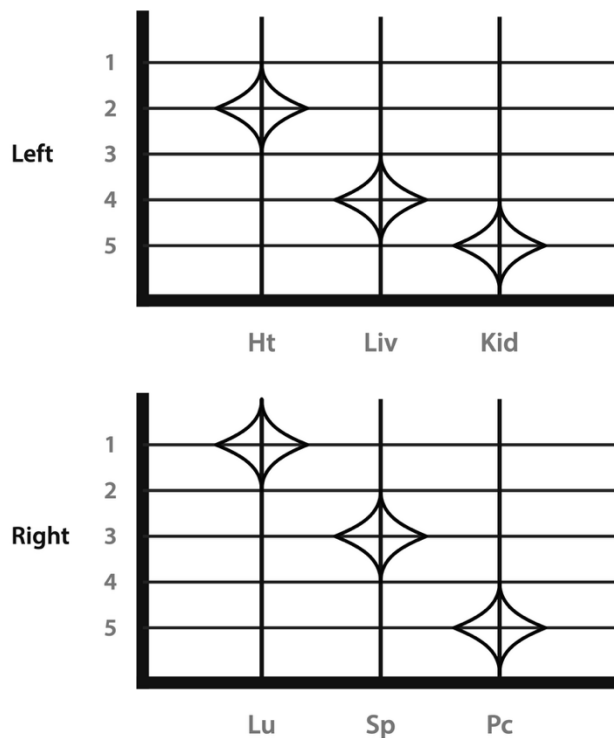


Figure 63

“Diamond” Parallel bilateral grid for notation of the five levels at each pulse position
To use simply shade in the diamonds where the pulse is felt. The diamond shape drawn here represents where the pulse should be felt at its widest. On this, you can then note the levels of the organs and show which one is not manifesting at the right level.

Now follow two simple examples, both very commonly encountered in clinic. The first is a “raised” kidney pulse; the second a “dropped” lung pulse:

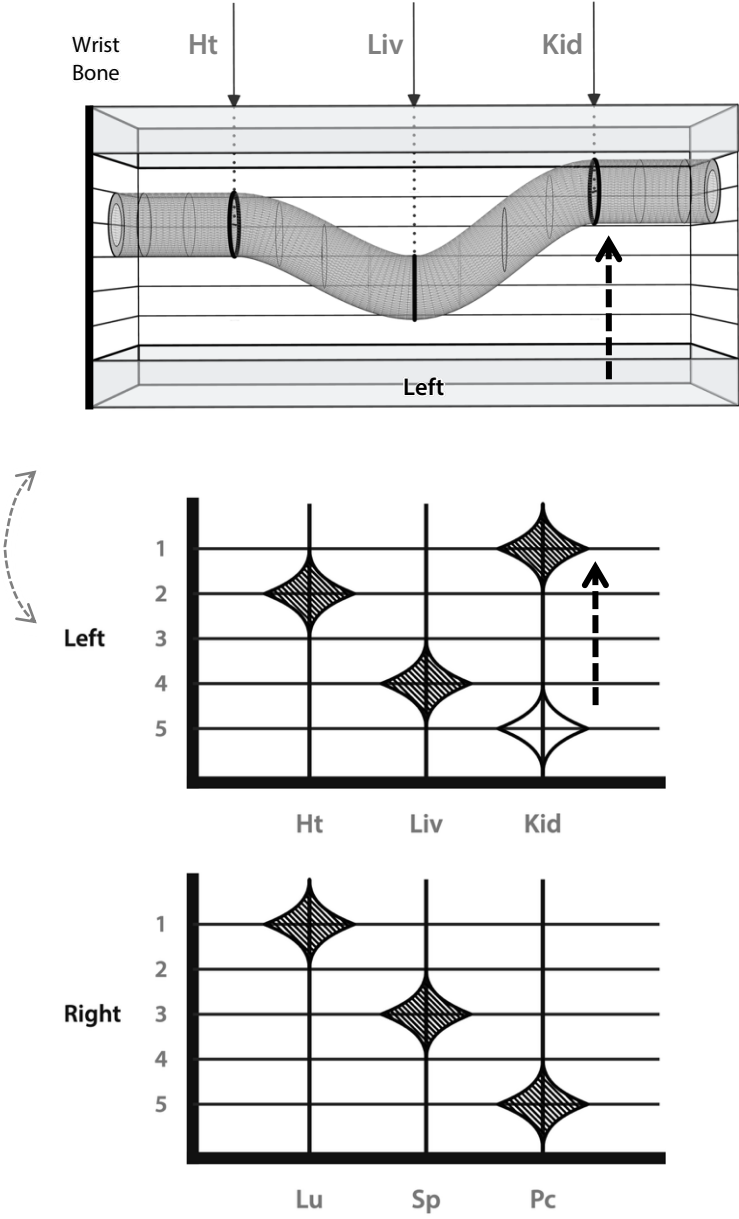
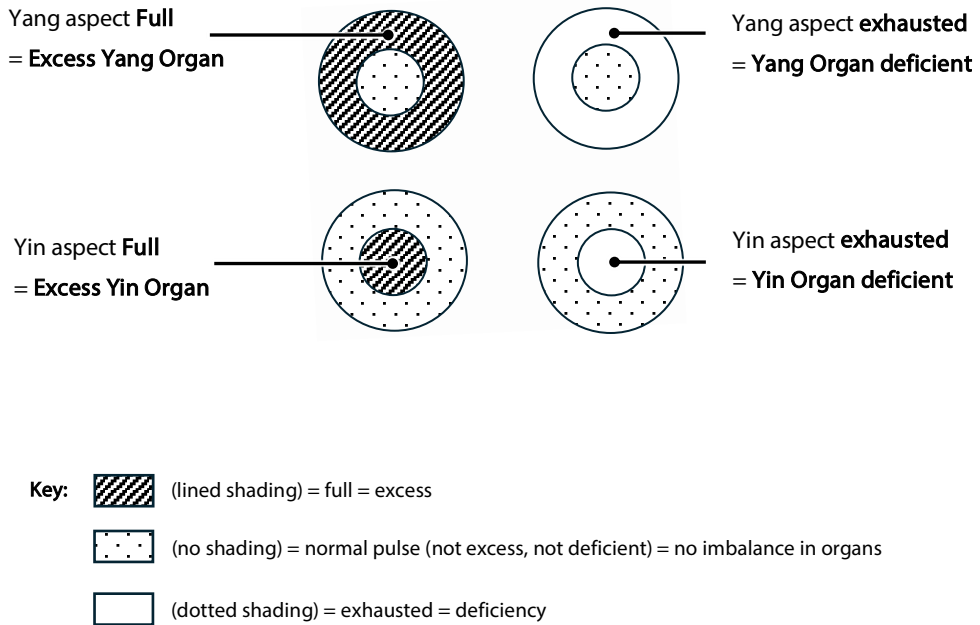


Figure 64
Example 1: kidney raised to 1st level: water diagnosed as the elemental imbalance

*Figure 72**4 States of qi (at any one position) makes “24 Qi”**Six cross-sections of the radial artery with pathologies of qi for those yin and yang organs.*

This *Mai Jing* passage is the first text relating to this C2 method, and the basic or simplest view. It also gives rise to the name “the 24 Qi”, as we can see that there are 24 kinds of states of qi that can exist – as explained already, excess or deficient, for yang or yin organs over the six positions. The view provided by this text is not the fullest or best however that the *Mai Jing* provides, as the next *Mai Jing* chapter gives another more sophisticated angle as we shall see.

Another Layer of Understanding

As for the model of these 24 Qi, I hope that it makes sense so far. At this point I would like you to look at Figure 72 above and study it for a minute. I wonder however if you have been wondering if all the possible options for diagnostic states have been covered in this diagram, which is basically a visual summary of

Connecting to the Lumen

As we go further into the process of understanding and palpating pulse qualities, particularly those qualities connected to texture, we can follow this practical exercise that brings our awareness to the lumen *only*.

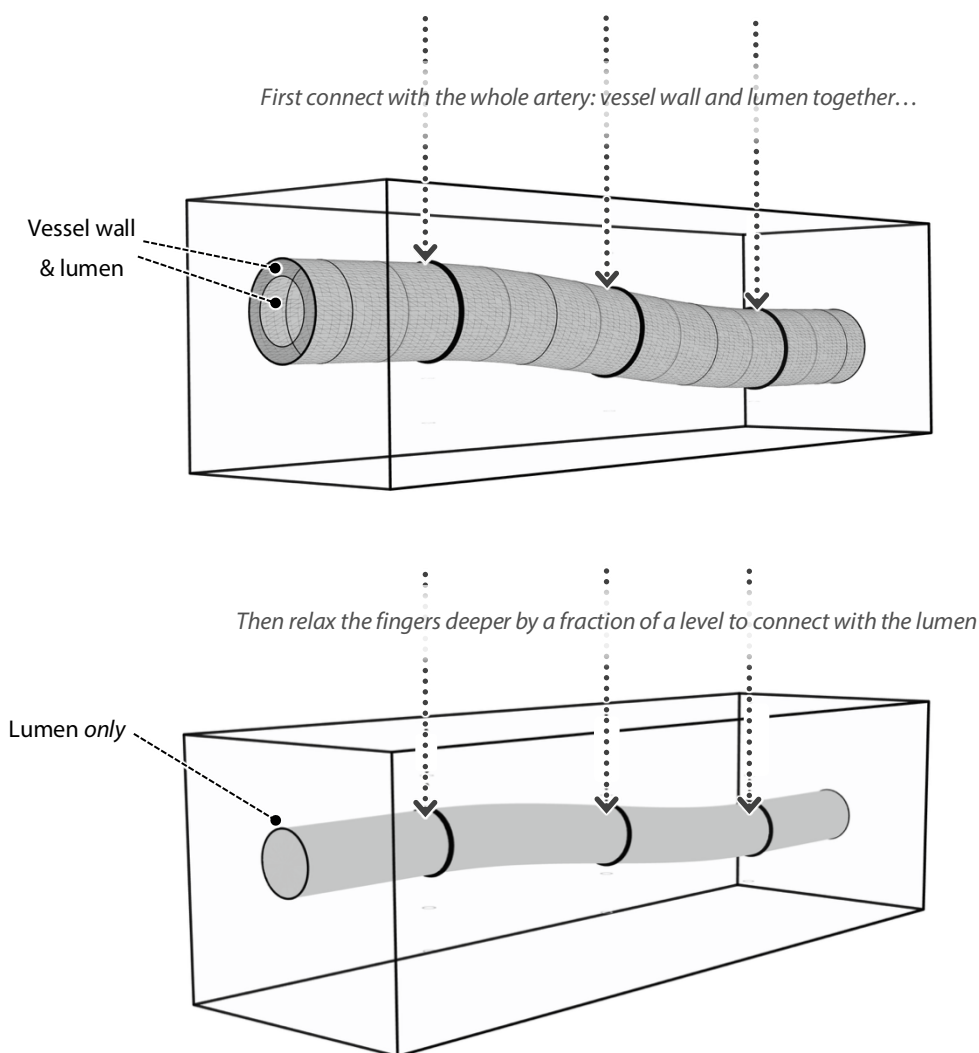


Figure 80

Bringing the palpatory awareness to the lumen only allows us to uncover the qualities

CHAPTER 19

PULSE MONOGRAPHS

Lakeside Master Pulse Study

I have provided here, in a new translation of this text, nearly all of the content of this excellent work. I chose to include nearly all the lines found in the source as they offer useful insights into the qualities. I left out a few passages where Li describes what he felt were earlier errors in the *Mai Jue* (later version) as I did not think this improved the underlying meaning of the translation.

The work comprises 27 passages, one for each pulse quality. There is a short preface, also given here. This preface is interesting in how Li describes the need for pulse diagnosis to take place in a framework of other methods. Then follows a detailed narrative of the qualities, which include long, short and confined. Every quality gets the following descriptions:

- Designation or type (whether its nature is yin, yang, yang in yin or yin in yang).
- A concise description: a summary of previous descriptions and definition, usually from named classics including the *Mai Jing*.
- A “Poem of its Form” a poetic description in seven-character verse.
- A “Poem of Similarities” – in seven-character verse – describing what this quality is like to help differentiate different qualities.
- A “Poem of Diseases” – in seven and four-character verse – describing what pathologies and diseases the quality may designate, including the meaning of the quality when found in specific positions.

All in all, an ideal jumping-off point to go deeper into pulse studies! Let us look now at the text.

5. 滑 Slippery-hua

滑 陽中陰

Slippery – Yang within Yin Type

滑脈：往來前卻，流利展轉。替替然如珠之應指。《脈經》。
漉漉如欲脫。

Slippery pulse, goes and comes, forwards and back in a flow, extending and turning,

rolling like pearls responding to the fingers. (*Mai Jing*)

Dripping and slipping, as if about to escape.

滑為陰氣有餘。故脈來流利如水。脈者血之府也，

血盛則脈滑。故腎脈宜之，氣盛則脈澀。故肺脈宜之。

Slippery indicates an excess of yin qi.

Thus the pulse comes smooth and flowing like water.

The pulse is the residence* of the blood, when blood is abundant the pulse becomes slippery, therefore, this is appropriate for the kidney pulse.

When qi is abundant the pulse becomes choppy, therefore, this is appropriate for the lung pulse.

體狀相類詩。滑脈如珠替替然，往來流利卻還前，

莫將滑數為同類，數脈惟看至數間。

Poem on Form and Similarities

The slippery pulse is like pearls rolling.

It moves smoothly forward and back, returning again.

Do not take slippery and rapid as the same type,

Rapid is judged only by the number of beats per breath.

滑則如珠。數則六至。

Slippery then feels like pearls – rapid has six beats per breath.

* 府 *fu* here is used to mean storehouse/providing residence, not “yang organ”.

主病詩。滑脈為陽元氣衰，痰生百病食生災，
上為吐逆下畜血，女脈調時定有胎。

Poem on Governing Diseases

The Slippery pulse arises when original yang qi is weakened.

Phlegm is generated, causing the hundred diseases – food engenders calamities.

Above – it causes vomiting and counterflow,

Below – it causes accumulation of blood*.

In women, with a pulse that is regulated and harmonious, it shows pregnancy.

寸滑膈痰生嘔吐，吞酸舌強或咳嗽，
當關宿食肝脾熱，渴痢癆淋看尺部。

When the *cun* pulse is slippery, phlegm accumulates in the diaphragm, giving rise to vomiting, there may be acid regurgitation, stiff tongue, or coughing.

At the *guan*, retained food, liver-spleen heat.

Thirst, dysentery, wasting, strangury – look to the *chi*.

滑主痰飲。浮滑風痰。沉滑食痰。滑數痰火。滑短宿食。

The slippery pulse governs phlegm and retained fluids.

Floating & slippery – wind-phlegm.

Deep & slippery – phlegm arising from food.

Slippery & rapid – phlegm-fire.

Slippery & short – retained food.

* 畜血 (*chu xue*) means retained or accumulated blood. This can be thought of as a precursor to the condition of blood stasis (瘀血 *yu xue*).

6. 澀 Choppy-se

澀 陰

Choppy – Yin Type

澀脈：細而遲。往來難。短且散。或一止復來。《脈經》。

參伍不調。《素問》。如輕刀刮竹。《脈訣》。

如雨沾沙。通真子。如病蠶食葉。

Choppy pulse: thin (*xi*) and slow (*chi*), goes and comes with difficulty, short and breaking up (*san*), sometimes stopping then returning. (*Mai Jing*)

Irregular in its combinations. (*Su Wen*)

Like a light knife scraping bamboo. (*Mai Jue*)

Like rain moistening sand. (Attributed to an early authority.)

Like sick silkworms eating leaves.

澀為陽氣有餘。氣盛則血少。故脈來蹇滯。而肺宜之。

Choppy indicates an excess of yang qi.

When qi is abundant, blood is insufficient.

Therefore the pulse arrives hesitant and stagnant,

And thus it is appropriate for the lung.

體狀詩。細遲短澀往來難，散止依稀應指間，

如雨沾沙容易散，病蠶食葉慢而艱。

Poem on Its Form

Thin, slow, short, and rough (*se*) – going and coming with difficulty.

Broken up and stopping, it responds faintly beneath the fingers.

Like rain moistening sand, easily dispersed.

Like sick silkworms eating leaves – slow and laborious.

相類詩。參伍不調名曰澀，輕刀刮竹短而難，

微似秒芒微戛甚，浮沉不別有無間。

Poem of Similarities

Uneven and without harmony is called choppy.

Like a light knife scraping bamboo – short and difficult.
 Minute (*wei*), like the tiniest tip of a blade of grass – extremely soft.
 Floating and Deep cannot be differentiated, it is at the threshold between
 presence and absence.

細遲短散時一止曰澀。極細而戛重按若絕曰微。

浮而柔細曰濡。沉而柔細曰弱。

Thin, slow, short, scattered, sometimes stopping is called choppy.
 Extremely thin and soft, disappearing under heavy pressure is called faint.
 Floating, soft and thin is called soggy.
 Deep, soft and thin is called weak.

主病詩。澀緣血少或傷精，反胃亡陽汗雨淋，
 寒濕入營為血痺，女人非孕即無經。

Poem on Governing Diseases

Choppy arises from blood deficiency or essence injury.
 Rebellious stomach, collapse of yang, sweating like rain.
 Cold-damp entering the nutritive level (*ying*) producing blood impediment (*bi*).
 In women – infertility from lack of menses.

寸澀心虛痛對胸，胃虛脅脹察關中，
 尺為精血俱傷候，腸結澀淋或下紅。

Choppy in the *cun* – heart deficiency with pain manifesting in the chest.
 At the *guan* – stomach deficiency with rib-side distention.
 At the *chi* – essence and blood both damaged,
 Intestinal binding, strangury, or bleeding from below.

澀主血少精傷之病。女子有孕為胎病。無孕為敗血。

Choppy governs diseases of blood deficiency and essence injury.
 In women – if pregnant, it indicates foetal disorder,
 If not pregnant, it indicates declining blood.

杜光庭云：澀脈獨見尺中，形散同代為死脈。

Du Guangting says: if the choppy pulse appears only in the *chi* position,
 And is scattered like the Intermittent pulse, it is a death pulse.