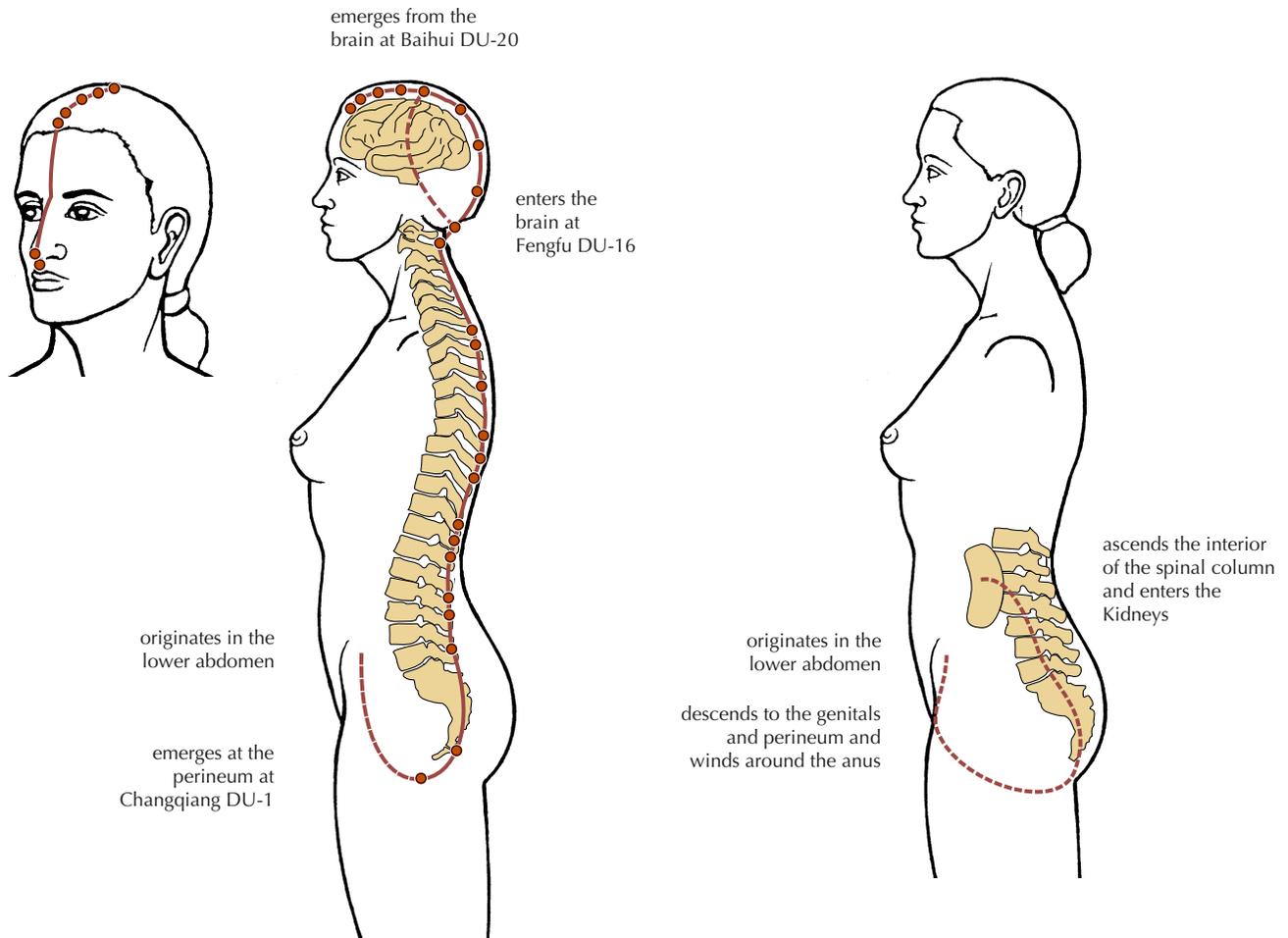

督
脈
經
穴

THE GOVERNING VESSEL

THE GOVERNING VESSEL



The Governing vessel primary pathway

The Governing vessel first branch

GOVERNING VESSEL PRIMARY PATHWAY

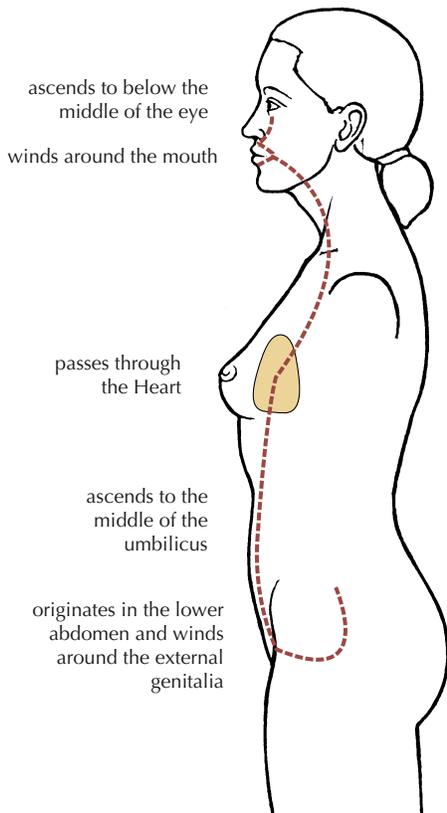
- originates in the lower abdomen,
- emerges at the perineum at Changqiang DU-1,
- runs posteriorly along the midline of the sacrum and the interior of the spinal column to Fengfu DU-16 at the nape of the neck,
- enters the brain,
- ascends to the vertex at Baihui DU-20,
- descends along the midline of the head to the bridge of the nose and the philtrum at Renzhong DU-26
- terminates at the junction of the upper lip and the gum.

Note

- Huiyin REN-1 and Chengjiang REN-24 are classified as meeting points of the Governing vessel with the Conception vessel.

The Governing vessel first branch

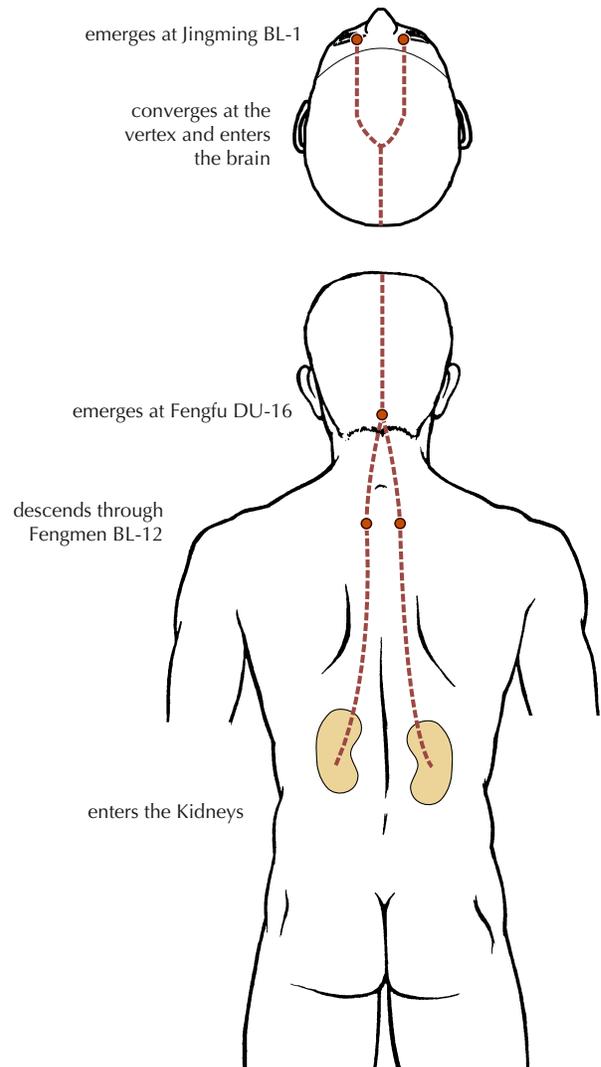
- originates in the lower abdomen,
- descends to the genitals and perineum,
- winds around the anus,
- ascends the interior of the spinal column,
- enters the Kidneys.



The Governing vessel second branch

The Governing vessel second branch

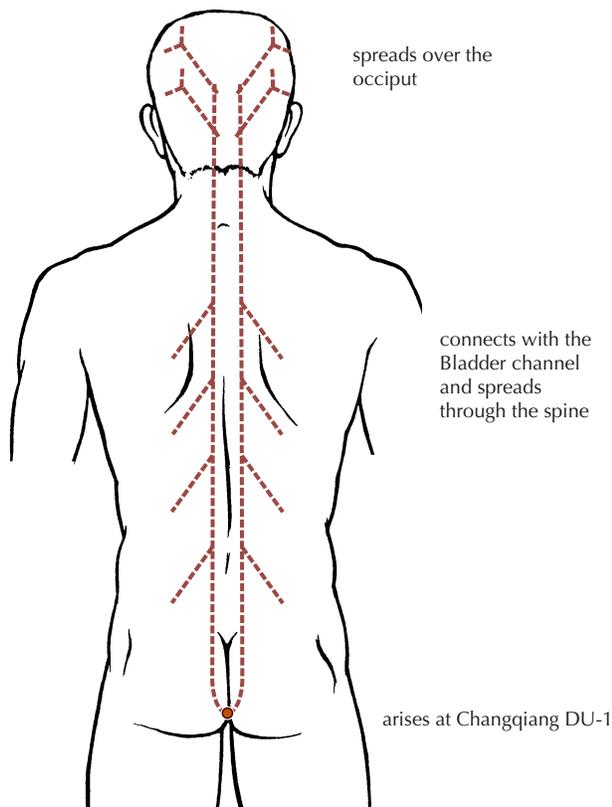
- originates in the lower abdomen,
- winds around the external genitalia,
- ascends to the middle of the umbilicus,
- passes through the Heart,
- ascends to the throat,
- winds around the mouth,
- ascends to below the middle of the eyes.



The Governing vessel third branch

The Governing vessel third branch

- emerges at Jingming BL-1,
- follows the Bladder channel bilaterally along the forehead,
- the bilateral branches converge at the vertex and enter the brain,
- the single channel emerges at Fengfu DU-16,
- then divides again, descending through Fengmen BL-12 along either side of the spine to the Kidneys.



The Governing luo-connecting vessel

THE GOVERNING LUO-CONNECTING VESSEL

- arises at Changqiang DU-1 and ascends bilaterally along the sides of the spine to the nape of the neck and spreads over the occiput.
- at the scapular region it connects with the Bladder channel and threads through the spine.

DISCUSSION

The Governing vessel is one of the eight extraordinary vessels, but along with the Conception vessel is exceptional among these eight in that it has its own acupuncture points. For this reason the Governing and Conception vessels are often included with the twelve primary channels (and together known as the fourteen channels). The other six extraordinary vessels have no points of their own, passing instead through points of the fourteen channels.

The Governing vessel is principally understood to be the channel that ascends through the spine to the brain. As the above description shows, however, its third pathway ascends the front of the body, whilst a branch of the Conception vessel arises in the pelvic cavity, enters the spine and ascends along the back. Li Shi-zhen, therefore, said "The Conception and Governing vessels are like midnight and midday, they are the polar axis of the body ... there is one source and two branches, one goes to the front and the other to the back of the body ... When we try to divide these, we see that yin and yang are inseparable. When we try to see them as one, we see that it is an indivisible whole"¹.

As far as the pathway of the Governing vessel is concerned, it is important to note that:

- the primary channel ascends both inside the spine and alongside the spine.
- the primary channel enters the brain at Fengfu DU-16 and at the vertex (Baihui DU-20).
- the primary channel enters the Kidneys.
- the primary channel passes through the Heart.
- the primary channel winds around the anus.
- the primary channel winds around the external genitals.
- the luo-connecting channel spreads through the occiput.

As a consequence of the various pathways of the Governing vessel and its relationship with the Kidneys, Heart and brain, we can summarise the actions of the points of the Governing vessel as follows:

- Treating diseases of the anus, rectum, and intestines. The Governing vessel winds around the anal region and the lower points of this channel (Changqiang DU-1 to Xuanshu DU-5) as well as Renzhong DU-26 above, treat diseases such as haemorrhoids, prolapse of the rectum and intestinal disorders.
- Treating diseases of the genitals, urinary system and uterus. The anterior pathway of the Governing vessel winds around the genitals, and points Changqiang DU-1 to Mingmen DU-4 treat diseases such as

- painful urinary dysfunction, urinary retention or difficulty, seminal emission, leucorrhoea and menstrual disturbance.
- Treating disorders of the spine. The Governing vessel ascends through the spinal column, and its points treat disorders of the spine, predominantly at their corresponding level.
 - Treating febrile diseases and reducing heat in the body. The Governing vessel is the ‘sea of the yang channels’ and its points are effective to reduce yang heat manifesting as heat of the body, fever and especially malaria.
 - Treating diseases of the zangfu. As the Governing vessel ascends along the spine, its points have the ability to treat diseases of the zangfu roughly corresponding to their location. This correspondence does not exactly mirror the back-shu points. For example Jinsuo DU-8 (which lies level with Ganshu BL-18, the back-shu point of the Liver) treats disharmony of the Liver, and points Shendao DU-11 (level with Xinshu BL-15 the back-shu point of the Heart) and Shenzhu DU-12 (level with Feishu BL-13 the back-shu point of the Lung) treat diseases of the Heart and Lung respectively. Zhiyang DU-9, however which lies beneath the seventh thoracic vertebra level with Geshu BL-17, treats diseases of the Stomach and Spleen. There is also a system of correspondence mentioned in the *Essential Questions*² which was discontinued in later texts, whereby for example Zhiyang DU-9 was said to treat heat in the Kidney, Lingtai DU-10 heat in the Spleen, Shendao DU-11 heat in the Liver etc.
 - Treating disorders of exterior or interior wind. Wind is a yang pathogen, and the Governing vessel is the ‘sea of the yang channels’. Many of its points are of vital importance in the treatment of exterior wind (especially Dazhui DU-14 and Fengfu DU-16), whilst from Jinsuo DU-8 upwards most points have a strong action on pacifying interior wind giving rise to such disorders as upward staring eyes, opisthotonos, lock-jaw, dizziness, head wind, windstroke, spasm and especially epilepsy.
 - Treating disorders of the sense organs. From Yamen DU-15 upwards, the points of the Governing vessel treat disorders of the tongue, eyes, face and especially the nose, through which the central portion of the channel descends.
 - Treating disorders of the Heart zang, primarily pain and palpitations. This may be explained by the passage of the anterior portion of the Governing vessel through the Heart.
- Treating disorders of the brain and spirit. It is striking how many points of the Governing vessel are indicated for the kind of disharmony usually associated with the Heart and spirit, for example mania-depression, manic behaviour, agitation, poor memory, disorientation, palpitations, insomnia, loss of consciousness and epilepsy. (see especially Baihui DU-20 and Shenting DU-24). There is indeed an apparent contradiction here within Chinese medicine theory. The concept that the spirit is stored in the Heart is of course an axiom of Chinese medicine and is attested to in various classics. The *Spiritual Pivot* says “The Heart controls the vessels; the vessels are the residence of the spirit”³, “When the blood and qi are already in harmony, the nutritive qi and defensive qi already communicating, the five zang already formed, the spirit will reside in the Heart”⁴, and “The Heart is the great master of the five zang and six fu and the residence of the essence spirit”⁵, whilst the *Essential Questions* says “The Heart stores the spirit”⁶. At the same time, there are many classical references to the idea that the spirit concentrates in the head and brain, for example the *Essential Questions* says “the head is the residence of the intelligence”⁷, the *Ten Works on Practice Toward the Attainment of Truth* says “The brain is the ancestor of the body’s form and the meeting place of the hundred spirits”⁸, the *Daoist Internal Mirror* says “The brain is the ancestral portal of the body, the capital where the ten thousand spirits meet”⁹, Sun Si-miao, in the *Thousand Ducat Formulas* says “The head is the supreme leader, the place where man’s spirit concentrates”, Li Shi-zhen says “The brain is the residence of the original spirit”, and the *Essentials of Materia Medica* says “All of a person’s memory resides in the brain”¹⁰.
- Three main factors may help to illuminate this theoretical difficulty: i. different traditions within Chinese medicine, ii. the influence of modern medicine, and iii. the inter-relationship of the Heart, blood, essence, brain and spirit.

Different traditions within Chinese Medicine

Both before and after the appearance of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic*, different traditions are apparent within the broad fields of Chinese medicine, spiritual practice and health preservation. In pre-*Inner Classic* times, a more structural perception of the human body placed the brain as the main organ in charge of mental activity¹¹. After the *Inner Classic*, when the study of medicine diverged and grew more independent of its Daoist roots, a more functional view of the body developed, based on the predominance of the five zang and six fu and their corre-

spondences (especially five phase correspondences), the brain being 'relegated' to the status of an extra fu, and the Heart becoming the sovereign of the body and the residence of the spirit. This divergence is reflected in the *Essential Questions* which says "I understand that there are some Daoists who have a completely different understanding of the nature of a zang and a fu. Some say the brain and the marrow are zang ... whereas others think of them as fu. If presented with a view other than their own, they insist that only their own interpretation is right"¹². Later esoteric Daoist texts strongly influenced certain great doctors of the Tang, Yuan and Ming dynasties such as Sun Si-miao, Zhang Jing-yue and Li Shi-zhen¹³. Their understanding of the role of the brain, and the principal acupuncture channel which influences it, the Governing vessel, again entered the corpus of Chinese medicine theory. At the same time, none of these doctors challenged the theory of the Heart and spirit as being essentially contradictory to the brain spirit theory.

The influence of modern medicine

During the Qing dynasty and the Republican era, knowledge of Western anatomy began to infiltrate China. One author who is considered to have been influenced by these developments was Wang Qing-ren who in the chapter 'On the Brain' (in *Correcting the Errors of Medicine* 1830) stated "intelligence and memory rely on the brain"¹⁴. Wang's book was published and distributed along with *A New Treatise on Anatomy*, a translation of basic Western medicine texts by an English medical missionary Benjamin Hobson and his assistant Chen Xiu-tang.

The inter-relationship of the Heart, Kidneys, essence, brain and spirit.

The *Spiritual Pivot*¹⁵ states "The brain is the sea of marrow", and it is a basic tenet of Chinese medicine that the Kidneys produce marrow to fill up the brain. The Kidneys' relationship to marrow is intimately tied up with the Kidney function of storing essence, which nourishes the brain and spinal cord. All aspects of the human organism derive from the coming together of the essence of the parents. The *Spiritual Pivot*¹⁶ says "Essence is the source of life, when the two essences unite [literally: struggle against each other] the spirit is formed", and the *Classic of Categories* says "The two essences, one yin and one yang, unite ... to form life; the essence of mother and father unite to form the spirit"¹⁷. In other words the pre-natal essence, derived from the parents, is intimately related to the Kidneys and brain and is the origin of the existence of the human being and the original source of the spirit. This is the meaning of the statements by Li Shi-zhen "The brain is the residence of the original spirit", and found in *A*

Record of Nourishing Xing and Extending Ming "Spirit, that is essence. If we can preserve essence, then the spirit will be bright; if spirit is bright, there will be long life"¹⁸. At the same time, various authors have stressed the relationship between the brain and the Heart, which is a reflection of the vital relationship between the Kidneys and Heart, water and fire. The *Differentiation and Treatment of Disease* stated "The spirit of the human being resides in the Heart, and the Heart's essence relies entirely on the Kidneys. Thus, the brain is the store house of the original spirit, the sea of essence marrow, and this is where memory comes from"¹⁹, and the Daoist classic *Collected Wisdom by Master Magic Sword* states "The qi of the Heart is connected with the Niwan Palace above"²⁰. Niwan ('Sticky Pellet' or 'Mud Ball Palace') in the Daoist tradition is the central one of the nine palaces of the brain where all the various spirits meet, and is considered to be the location of the material basis of the spirit. Niwan is discussed in various Daoist classics, for example "The origin of essence-spirit in the brain is also called Niwan" and "The entire spirit that expresses in the face has its origin in Niwan"²¹, and "At the top of the human body, there is Tiangu Niwan, this is where the spirit is stored ... Tiangu, that is the Original Palace, the residence of the original spirit, where mental and spiritual brightness exists, the most important aspect of spirit"²².

The Governing vessel in its anterior pathway passes through the Heart, and in its posterior pathway penetrates the brain. This linkage between the brain and Heart was discussed by Cheng Xing-gan who said "When marrow is full, thinking is clear. Too much thinking leads to Heart fire which burns the brain ... the marrow is rooted in the essence and connects downwards with the Governing vessel; when the ming men warms and nourishes, the marrow is full"²³.

In conclusion, the Governing vessel is the channel that mediates between the brain and the Heart. Clinically many of its points may be used to treat a variety of psycho-emotional disorders, in much the same way that points of the twelve principal channels may be used, especially those of the Heart and Pericardium. If we try to be more precise about the use of the Governing vessel points, we can suggest that i. their indications generally reflect excess patterns of spirit disharmony such as mania-depression, and ii. they are especially indicated when psycho-emotional disorders are accompanied by fullness and discomfort of the head, dizziness, disturbance of consciousness and epilepsy.