4 Channels, Organs, and Points

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4.1 System of Channels and Organs

According to traditional ideas the vital energy flows through a system of channels also called meridians and regulates the body functions. It is possible to exert a direct therapeutic effect on the channels and organs, and thus in turn on body functions, by needling acupuncture points.

The 11 organs described by Chinese medicine interact intimately with the channels. The structure and topography of the organs was subordinate in Chinese medicine. “Organs” in the Chinese sense has much more the meaning of the functions of organ systems. The functional system of the lung, for example, involves all respiratory processes, including olfactory. This is why the term “functional systems” is also used.

The 11 organs or functional systems were divided into 6 Yang organs and 5 Yin organs. The 6 Yang organs are called Fu organs in Chinese: they are the hollow organs, i.e., large intestine, small intestine, stomach, urinary bladder, gallbladder and “Sanjiao.” The functions of the Fu organs are similar to those in Western medicine. The 5 Yin organs are the Zang organs: lung, heart, spleen, kidney and liver. Pericardium is not considered as a Zang organ, but it has a channel. The traditional functions of the five Zang organs are described here:

Heart Xin governs all other organs and regulates the flow of blood and Qi. It stores and rules the mental energy, the mind, and consciousness (Shen). According to traditional Chinese diagnosis “the
heart opens to the tongue.” The climatic factor is heat, and the emotion is joy or agitation.

**Lung** *Fei* controls the respiration and is responsible for the intake of Qi. “The clear lung Qi flows downward.” The lung governs the surface of the body, the skin, and the bodyhair, and has its expression in the voice. According to traditional theory “it opens to the nose.” The lung is very sensitive and vulnerable to external climatic influences.

**Spleen** *Pi* controls the digestion of food and is responsible for the intake of fluids. It assimilates the Qi from nutrition, transforms it and nourishes the internal organs and moves and nourishes the blood. The spleen governs the connective tissue and holds the organs in place. It opens to the mouth and is manifested in the lips.

**Liver** *Gan* is responsible for the movement of all body fluids. It moves the Qi and stores the blood. The liver Qi controls the movements of the body and nourishes muscles and tendons. It produces the bile, the Yang aspect. The liver nourishes the eyes. The pathogenic climatic influence is the wind. Liver needs moisture and kidney Yin. Liver disharmonies are characterized by stagnation, and often by excess.

**Kidney** *Shen* is the root of life (reproduction); it stores the Jing, the essence, and is the base of growth and development. It rules water (Yin aspect) and excretes the impure. Mental activity and sexual potency, *Ming Men Huo, fire of the gate of life* form the Yang aspect. The kidney nourishes the bones, joints and teeth, rules the ears and manifests in head hair. The kidney energy weakens in old age.

One Yin and one Yang organ form a **functional unit**, which involves a particular tissue, and the corresponding channels. The channel (Jing) can be compared with a branch deriving from the tree represented by the organ. The acupuncture points are situated along the channel like buds. By way of these points a therapeutic influence can be exerted on the organ function by the application of needles, heat, or massage.

A **pair of channels** consists of a Yin and a Yang channel (e.g., lung and large intestine channels) which run parallel to one an-