

Chapter 3

The Nine Palaces & Eight Trigrams

The system of the nine palaces and eight trigrams is another derivative from the Luo River Inscription. The picture of the eight trigrams was presumably invented by Fu Xi and is called the earlier or former heaven chart of the eight trigrams. In this chart, *qian* (three unbroken lines), denoting south, and *kun* (three broken lines), standing for north, constitute the signposts when the eight trigrams are arranged in a circle.

It is said that King Wen of the Zhou dynasty, *i.e.*, the third dynasty in Chinese history, rearranged the sequential order of the eight trigrams and remolded them on the basis of the Luo River Inscription. Now *kan* (an unbroken line in the middle with broken lines above and below) stands in the north and *li* (two unbroken lines flanking one broken line in between) is located in the south. Thus the order of the trigrams clockwise becomes 1 *kan*, 8 *gen* (one unbroken line above two broken lines), 3 *zhen* (two broken lines above one unbroken line), 4 *xun* (one broken line under two unbroken lines), 9 *li* (two unbroken lines with one broken line in between), 2 *kun* (three broken lines), 7 *dui* (one broken line above two unbroken lines), and 6 *qian* (three unbroken lines). Note that the numbers preceding the trigrams are their codes. In the picture, an additional *kun* trigram appears in the center. Compared to Fu Xi's arrangement, this picture is called the later heaven chart. The positions where trigrams are located are called palaces. Put together, there are nine palaces including the center. See Figure 9.

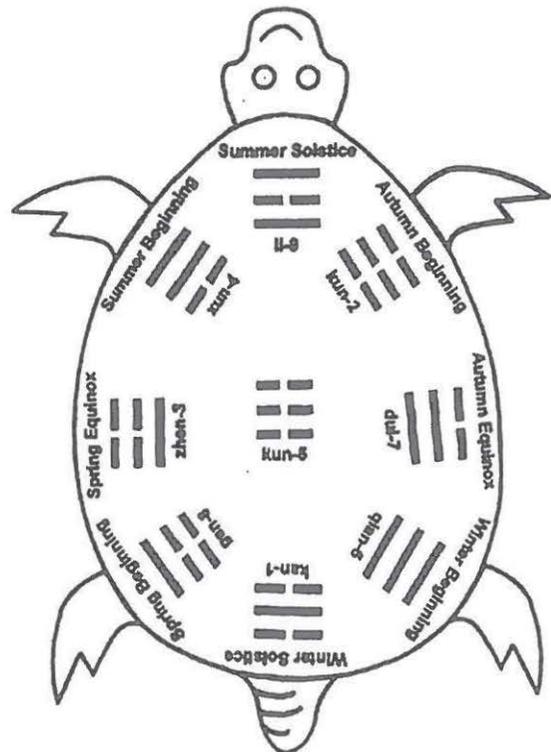


Figure 9

Note: South is at the top and north is at the bottom. Thus the left side is west, while the right is east.

This chart of the nine palaces and eight trigrams can be used to indicate a number of correspondences, for example, the eight important seasonal nodes, namely Winter Solstice, Beginning of Spring, Spring Equinox, Beginning of Summer, Summer Solstice, Beginning of Autumn, Autumn Equinox, and Beginning of Winter. Based on this diagram, a number of special needling methods were developed, such as the soaring eightfold method.¹⁶

The latter heaven picture of the nine palaces and eight trigrams can be reduced to a table traditionally called the eight trigram array or wonder array as shown below.

Codes of the Nine Palaces & Eight Trigrams

<i>Xun</i> 4	<i>Li</i> 9	<i>Kun</i> 2
<i>Zhen</i> 3	5	<i>Dui</i> 7
<i>Gen</i> 8	<i>Kan</i> 1	<i>Qian</i> 6

In the above table, any three numbers in any vertical, horizontal, or slanting line always add up to 15.

If we match the nine palaces and eight trigrams with the 12 channels, then we get the following table.

<i>Xun</i> 4 Mouth	<i>Li</i> 9 Ht/SI Channels	<i>Kun</i> 2 Per/TB Channels
<i>Zhen</i> 3 GB/Liv Channels	Central Palace 5 Middle Burner	<i>Dui</i> 7 LI Channel
<i>Gen</i> 8 St/Sp Channels	<i>Kan</i> 1 Bl/Ki Channels	<i>Qian</i> 6 Lu Channel

The blood and qi flow in the channels starting from *Xun* 4 in order of the trigrams as below: mouth (*Xun* 4)→ middle burner (Central Palace 5)→ lung channel (*Qian* 6)→ large intestine channel (*Dui* 7)→ stomach-spleen channels (*Gen* 8)→ heart-small intestine channels (*Li* 9)→ bladder-kidney channels (*Kan* 1)→ pericardium-triple burner channels (*Qian* 2)→ gallbladder-liver channels (*Zhen* 3).

¹⁶ For more information on the medical correspondences and uses of the eight trigrams, see Miki Shima's *The Medical I Ching* also published by Blue Poppy Press.

Time factors may also be incorporated into this flow chart. Each day is divided into 12 watches each of which correspond to one of the 12 earthly branches. In this case, we begin with *Yin* (B3) rather than *Zi* (B1). Then the following order is presented: Lu *Yin* (B3)→ LI *Mao* (B4)→ St *Chen* (B5)→ Sp *Si* (B6)→ Ht *Wu* (B7)→ SI *Wei* (B8)→ Bl *Shen* (B9)→ Ki *You* (B10)→ Per *Xu* (B11)→ TB *Hai* (B12)→ GB *Zi* (B1)→ Liv *Chou* (B2)

In order to use the midday-midnight method of point selection, one must know which channel the qi is visiting in a given watch. This knowledge is obtained through a method called branch-based enumeration. This enumeration is based on the above flow chart.

The development of Fu Xi's eight trigrams

Fu Xi was supposedly the inventor of the eight trigrams. He is believed to have lived in the fiftieth century BCE. His chart is as follows in Figure 10:



Figure 10

In his work, the *Zhou Yi Can Tong Qi* (*Anthology With Reference to the Zhou's [Classic of] Changes*), Wei Bo-yang of the Eastern Han dynasty came up with stem-based enumeration. This is a combination of Fu Xi's trigrams with the heavenly stems and the four quarters of the compass. First, *jia* (S1) and *yi* (S2) are set respectively in the south and the north to join *qian* and *kun*. Then the other heavenly stems are distributed to produce the following picture in Figure 11:

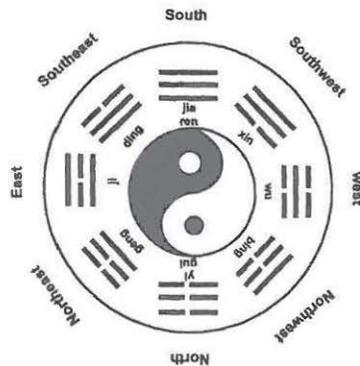


Figure 11

Therefore, the above chart is called the Stem-based Enumeration Chart. Wei Bo-yang further included the months and other such divisions of time in this chart, thus presenting a complicated picture of the correlations of time and space with the eight trigrams. This improved picture provides us with a practical basis for determining the physical condition of any person in terms of their qi and blood or yin and yang at any period of time. This then directly led to the design of the midday-midnight method of point selection and the soaring eightfold method.

There are only eight possible permutations of combinations of three broken and unbroken lines. These are the eight trigrams or *ba gua*. These eight variations form a system of correspondences which can be used to explain every change of yin and yang in the universe. It was Wei Bo-yang who first used this system to explain human physiology and pathology. He linked the eight trigrams with the five viscera and six bowels. For example, according to Wei, the trigram *kan* corresponds to the kidneys, while the trigram *li* corresponds to the heart. Wei further went on to explain the various physiological and pathological ramifications of each trigram. For instance, *kan* is the trigram corresponding to water. The kidneys also correspond to water which is yin essence. Storing yin essence, the kidneys govern the bones, engender the marrow, and are responsible for reproduction. The trigram signifying the kidneys consists of a single unbroken line (yang) between two broken lines (yin). This tells us that, though yin in nature, the kidneys do, nonetheless, possess yang within yin. Furthermore, yin corresponds to the female and yang to the male. Accordingly, yin containing yang describes the kidneys' function of sexual reproductive.

The trigram *li* represents fire, and fire is the nature of the heart. The trigram *li* consists of two unbroken lines (yang) with one broken line (yin) in the middle. This symbolizes that yang is rooted in yin in terms of the heart and its functions. This implies not only that the heart exercises its control over the blood vessels mainly through fire (yang) but also that the heart is the governor of the spirit light (i.e., wisdom, emotions, etc.) due to nothing other than the yin element (blood) it contains. Thus the heart function is likened to flame. A flame produces its brilliance solely on the basis of its yin substance or fuel, such as oil or wax.

In order to explain even more complex combinations of yin and yang, the eight trigrams are combined into an even larger system of 64 hexagrams. Each hexagram is made up of two trigrams. Therefore, eight times eight equals 64. For instance, if the trigram *kan* is combined on top of *li*, we get the hexagram *ji*. If we put *kan* under *li*, we get the hexagram *wei ji*. *Ji* means interaction between the heart and the kidneys or balance between water and fire. *Wei Ji* means non-existence of

such an interaction. Many Chinese medical practitioners use the word *ji* when describing heart fire's reaching down to the kidneys and kidney water's upward communication with the heart. Since these two opposites, fire and water, are well coordinated, the whole body is in a good state. On the contrary, if heart fire and kidney water do not interact with one another, then heart fire flames upward and kidney water drains downward. The yin-yang balance in the body is lost, and there are various symptoms of disease. In that case, one should take remedial measures to restore the interaction between fire and water.

The above is only one example of how the eight trigrams and 64 hexagrams are used in Chinese medicine to describe physiology and pathology in relation to the channel and vessels, viscera and bowels. Moreover, these two systems are also used to design treatment protocols and invent new therapies. In addition to the *ling gui ba fa* (eightfold method of the sacred tortoise) and the *zi wu liu zhu liao fa* (midday-midnight method of point selection), eye needling, ear needling, and navel needling were all originally developed from the trigrams and hexagrams. Even today, these trigrams and hexagrams still inspire such new inventions. In Taiwan, for instance, some acupuncturists have recently put forward a new needling method based on matching the eight trigrams with the 14 channels.¹⁷

The diagram on the following page show how *tai ji* (two ideograms in the very center) evolve into yin and yang, the four manifestations, the eight trigrams, and ultimately the sixty-four hexagrams. This chart is taken from Zhng Jing-yue's *Lei Jing Tung Yi [The Systematic Classic's Illustrated Appendix]*.

¹⁷ The 14 channels refer to the 12 regular channels plus the governing and conception or controlling vessels. These are the 14 most commonly used channels and vessels in acupuncture.