

After 20 years of lecturing TCM in the West, practitioners and students have often asked me about some difficult and knotty questions concerning TCM theory and acupuncture. Due to insufficient information on TCM theory and some misunderstanding in translations, many issues of acupuncture and TCM theory remain unclear.

In this series of columns, I will explain 81 difficult questions by using the classical texts of TCM and acupuncture to answer these questions to enhance the level of TCM theory of those who desire to explore the treasure of wisdom of Traditional Chinese Medicine.



Question: Why does Zú Tàì Yīn Pí Jīng (Spleen Meridian) has a Zú Tàì Yīn Luò Mài and the Spleen Dà Luò (Great Luo vessel)?

All the twelve meridians on the limbs have a luò-connecting meridian branching from the main meridian which connects with the coupled yīn and yáng meridian.

Zú Tàì Yīn Pí Jīng (Spleen Meridian) has the Zú Tàì Yīn Luò Mài, starting at SP-4 Gōngsūn.

So, why does the Spleen, as the only Zàng, has another luò mài starting at SP-21 Dàbāo, called the Great Luò Mài of the Spleen?

To answer this question, we need to look into the concept of the Spleen meridian and the Spleen Zàng.

The luò mài of the Spleen meridian SP-4 Gōngsūn belongs to the luò-connecting meridian on the limb, which branches out to connect with the Stomach Yángmíng meridian.

SP-21 Dàbāo is the luò mài which connects to the Spleen Zàng. It branches out on the chest. SP-21 Dàbāo is the luò mài which distributes qì and xuè on the trunk.

The Spleen belongs to Earth and is localized in the middle jiāo (warmer). It

is the source of generation of qì and xuè. Within the Five Phases theory, Earth/Spleen is localized in the center. The *Huáng Dì Nèi Jīng Sùwèn* Chapter 29 Tàiyīn Yàngmíng Lùn states that “the four limbs receive the nourishing Gǔ Qì generated by the Stomach, which must be transported by the Spleen.”

In *Sùwèn* Chapter 45 Lué Lùn, it is pointed out that the Spleen is in charge of transportation of jīn-yè generated by the Stomach.

Also in *Sùwèn* Chapter 29 it is described that the Spleen is at the center and in charge of the four directions, the four seasons, and responsible for the other four Zàng, and the four limbs. Therefore, SP-21 Dàbāo can treat pain of the whole body.

According to the theory of Qi streets*, the Rén Mài is on the front side and is the Sea of Yīn Qí. The Dū Mài is on the backside and is the Sea of Yáng Qí.

SP-21 Dàbāo as the Great Luò horizontally connects all the meridians on the right, left, front, and back and therefore affects the whole body.

The ‘common’ luò mài of the meridians are indicated for the treatment of disorders of the respective meridian and the yīn and yáng coupled meridian.

But the Great Luò of the Spleen treats pain of the whole body.

This is due to the Spleen as post-heaven Zàng being in charge of the whole body. Zhang Yin An comments during the Qīng dynasty: "The Spleen generates qì, xuè and transports jīn-yè.

The Great Luò of the Spleen distributes qì, xuè and jīn-yè through the whole body. If pathology is manifested, it causes pain of the whole body and of the limbs."

Since the Spleen controls blood, its Great Luò Mài dominates this function of blood distribution through the minute luò (sūn and fú luò) of the whole body. When blood stagnates "there is pain of the whole body"; when blood is deficient and unable to nourish the tissues, "the hundred joints are flaccid".

In clinic, we often needle or prick to bleed SP-21 Dàbāo, and apply Guasha to the Spleen Dà Luò, Rén Mài, and Dū Mài for treatment.

* sì jiē: the four streets, which are head, chest, abdomen and legs. See Qì Jiē in Língshū Chapter 62 Dòng Shū.

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