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**Celebrating 30 Years**

# The Origins of the Universe and the Four (or Twelve) Gates

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**A new approach for understanding the traditional point combination of the Four Gates as well as two new point pairings explained with a functional model of channel interactions and six element theory.**

## ABSTRACT

The clinical application of the treatment protocol titled 'the Four Gates' is known by almost every acupuncturist. This combination of Liv 3 *tai chong* and LI 4 *he gu* is one of the bedrocks of modern clinical psycho-emotional work in TCM. And yet, where does it come from? why does it work? and when should it be used? These are questions that are rarely asked and even more rarely answered. The objective of this article is to shed light on this point combination and at the same time introduce two other possibilities that can be used instead of the traditional Four Gates. And in addition to examining the Four Gates, there is also a story to revise the elements and their interactions.

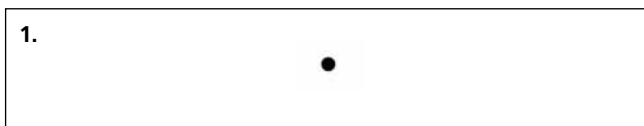
## INTRODUCTION

One of the most famous point combinations in modern day acupuncture is the coupling of Liv 3 *tai chong* with LI 4 *he gu*. This pairing is referred to as the Four Gates. One of its current uses in modern TCM is for psycho-emotional disturbances and is indicated as it harmonises the free flow of *qi*. This explanation will be developed further on. Yet the origins of this most famous treatment can be difficult to pinpoint and understand. In this article a new configuration of the traditional Five Elements will be presented that includes a sixth element named Heaven. Using the new model of the elements, the channels and *zang fu* will be associated giving a workable tool to understand the interactions and use of the Four Gates. Using the logic that was applied to the Four Gates in this article, two additional point combinations are extrapolated and examined as to their use. Finally, a comparison of the three different variations of the Four Gates is discussed and case studies are presented to demonstrate their application and benefits.

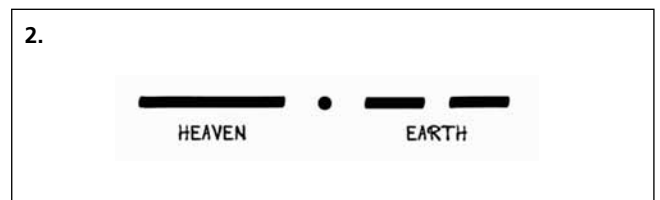
The model that is used to understand the channels is called the Unified Acupuncture Theory and was first presented in the article The Foundations of Channel Theory published in the *Journal of Chinese Medicine* in 2012. To reintroduce this model here, it will be presented as a creation myth. This is written in a story format, which allows for some difficult concepts to be presented in a more accessible manner. The discussion on the Four Gates that follows, will use many of the ideas from the myth itself.

### The Creation story of the Six Elements

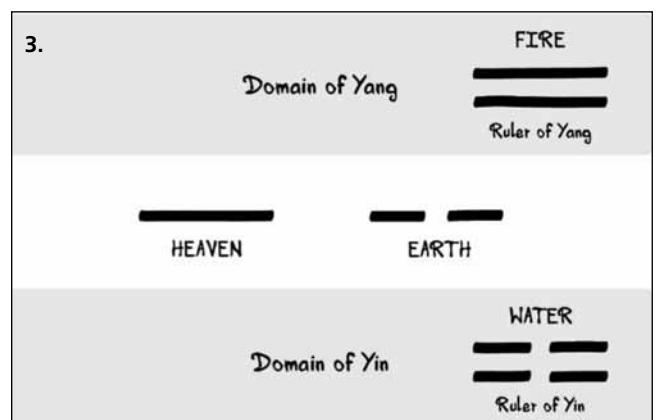
Before the beginning there was a great Void. This Void had everything that never was and everything that would ever be all in a single point. This is represented as a dot on a blank piece of paper (Image 1).



From here, the Void started to come into existence and separated into two main forces or factettes of itself. These forces were called *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* started to move and become manifest. As they became manifest, they solidified into two entities Heaven and Earth. To represent *yang*, a solid line is used and to represent *yin* a broken line is used (Image 2).

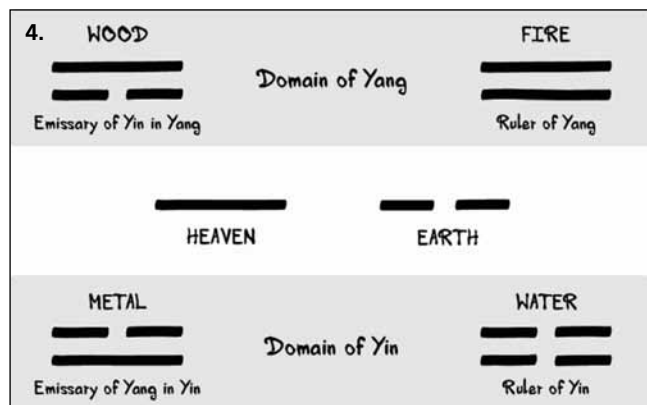


Heaven and Earth spent a long time exploring and interacting. After a while they wanted to become more manifest. So, Heaven created a new element and called it Fire whereas Earth created a new element to balance Fire and called it Water. Fire, which came from Heaven, was from *yang* and manifested *yang*. Therefore it has a bottom line of *yang* showing its origin in *yang* and a top line of *yang* showing its manifestation *yang*. Water, which came from Earth, was from *yin* and manifested *yin*. It has a bottom line of *yin* showing its origin and a top line of *yin* showing its manifestation. Fire, being of *yang* and manifesting *yang*, rose and proclaimed that all above would be the domain of *yang* and Fire would be its Ruler. Water, being of *yin* and manifesting *yin*, sank down and proclaimed that all below was the domain of *yin* and Water would be its Ruler. (Image 3).



Fire was the Ruler in the domain of *yang* and Water the Ruler in the domain of *yin*. Fire's nature is fiery and always in movement whereas Water's nature is watery and more prone to stillness. It was very difficult for these two Rulers to discuss matters as they are of such opposing temperaments. So, Water created an element that was based in *yin* but could manifest *yang* and placed it in the domain of *yang* as its Emissary and called it Wood.

Wood has a bottom line of *yin* which is its origin and a top line of *yang* which is its manifestation. Fire did the same and created an element that was based in *yang* and manifested *yin* and placed it in the domain of *yin* as its Emissary and called it Metal. Metal has a bottom line of *yang* which is its origin and a top line of *yin* which is its manifestation (Image 4).



Each domain has a Ruler and an Emissary representing the other Ruler. The Ruler is of the nature of the domain and manifests the nature of the domain. So, Fire is of *yang* and manifests *yang*, whereas Water is of *yin* and manifests *yin*. The emissary is a mix of the two natures. It is of an opposite nature to where it is placed and manifests the nature of where it is placed. Wood is of *yin* and manifests *yang* so it is in the domain of *yang*. Metal is of *yang* and manifests *yin*, so it is in the domain of *yin*.

Examining the Creation Myth of the Six Element system In looking at the above story, there are three stages of creation. There is the stage of original creation which is in the centre and made up of Heaven and Earth. Then there is the stage of the Rulers which is on the right-hand side of the image and has Fire and Water. The last stage is of the Emissaries and on the left-hand side of the page and is Wood and Metal. When examined it can be seen that the *yin* lines which are broken balance the *yang* lines which are solid.

At the Origin level in the centre, there is only one *yin* and one *yang* line as they are the original *yin* and *yang*. Therefore, Heaven is the *yang* line and Earth is the *yin* Line. At the Ruler level each element has two lines, but they are both the same. Fire has a *yang* line below and a *yang* line above, in contrast to Water which has a *yin* line below and a *yin* line above. At the Emissary level each element has both a *yang* and a *yin* line but in different configurations. The Wood element, which is in the domain of *yang* and is there to represent *yin* has a *yin* line below to denote that it is *yin* in nature, and has a *yang* line above to denote that it manifests *yang* and can talk to the Ruler of *yang* which is Fire. The Metal element is the opposite. Metal is in the domain of *yin* and is there to represent *yang*. Therefore, it has a *yang* line below which is its nature and a *yin* line above which is how it manifests.

The channels can be associated with the elements to give a working model of channel interactions. The *yin* channels are our guide to associate the channels to the elements as the body is a manifested representation of the universe and *yin* in its nature is more manifested. Therefore, the placement of the channels will

use the understanding of the *yin* channels and organs and only once the *yin* channels have been understood will the *yang* channel associations be added. If the *yin* organ associated with a channel is above the diaphragm and the channel is on the arm, then it will be associated with a *yang* element that is either all *yang* or has a *yang* line on the bottom. And if the *yin* organ is below the diaphragm and the associated channel is on the leg, then it will be associated with a *yin* element that has either all *yin* lines or a bottom line that means the element is rooted in *yin*.

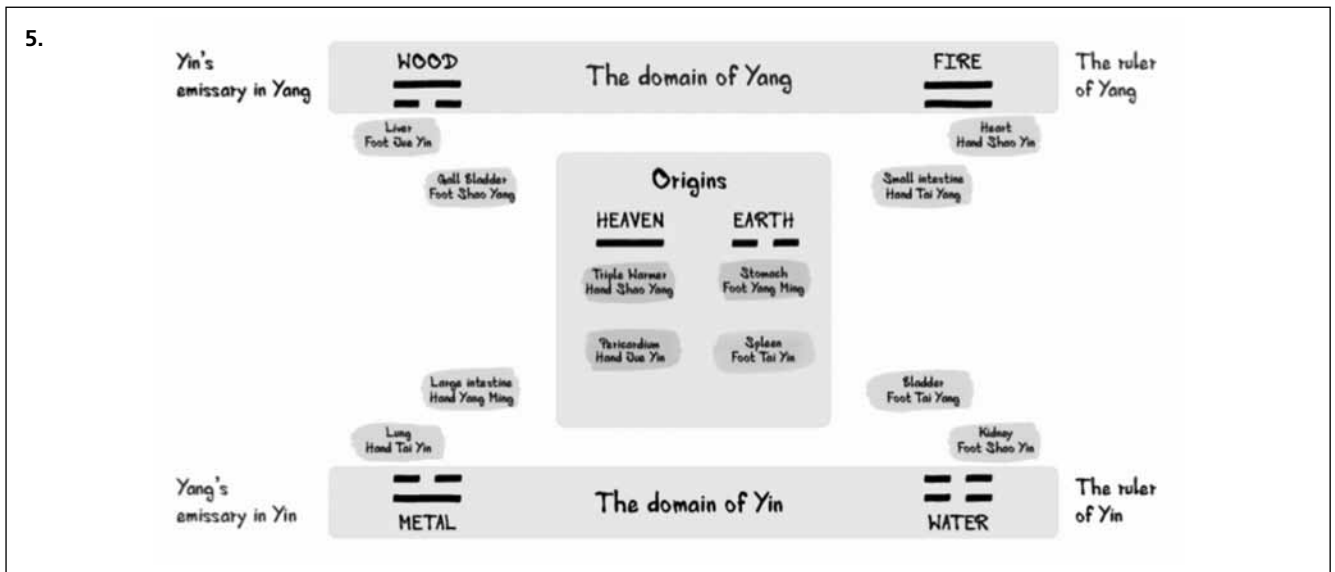
The *yang* elements are Heaven, Fire and Metal and the *yin* elements are Earth, Water and Wood. Upon examination of the organs associated with the channels, it can be seen there are three *yin* organs associated with the *yang* elements and three *yin* organs associated with the *yin* elements. The three *yin* organs that are associated with the *yang* elements are Pericardium, Heart and Lung; and the three *yin* organs associated with the *yin* elements are Spleen, Kidney and Liver. The explanation of the correspondences of the elements to their associated channels is discussed in this author's book *Sun's Dance of the Channels*. A summary of the associations is provided below:

- Heaven – Pericardium and Triple Warmer
- Fire – Heart and Small Intestine
- Metal – Lungs and Large Intestine
- Earth – Spleen and Stomach
- Water – Kidney and Bladder
- Wood – Liver and Gall Bladder

The association of Pericardium and Triple Warmer with the element of Heaven is not in the classical texts and is a speciality to this system and story. Traditionally, these two channels and organs are associated with the Fire element and placed in a subcategory called the Minister of Fire. In this model, the inclusion of the element Heaven allows for this channel pair to have its own element. The logic for this is as such: The type of *qi* that circulates in the Triple Warmer channel is called *yuan qi* or source *qi*. This *qi* is associated with the heavenly mandate of the organs and the channels. This indicates that the Triple Warmer has a direct link to the idea of Heaven in Chinese medical thought. The Pericardium is a little more subtle. There is a point on the Hand *jue yin* Pericardium channel that is associated with the *yuan*-source *qi*. This point is P 7 *da ling* which can be translated into Great Mound. The reference to Great Mound is connected to an idea in Chinese thought that the emperor would rule by the Mandate of Heaven. Fire is the Ruler of *yang* and gets its authority from Heaven. In ancient times, when it was time to crown an emperor, the priest would go to the great mound behind the temple and look up at the stars. If the signs were right, they would say that the emperor would get the Mandate of Heaven and could rule. The fact that the *yuan*-source point of the Hand *jue yin* Pericardium channel has the name of Great Mound indicates that it is indeed where Heaven descends and gives its blessing to the Fire (Image 5).

#### The three different Four Gates

In acupuncture treatments, there is a very well-known combination of points that is called the Four Gates. This is a point combination that is mostly used for emotional turmoil in a patient. According to Deadman in *A Manual of Acupuncture*, 'This combination first



appeared in the *Ode to Elucidate Mysteries* which said “for cold and heat with painful obstruction, open the Four Gates”. ... *he gu* L.I. -4, the yuan-source point, belongs to yangming channel which is “abundant in qi and blood” whilst *tai chong* LIV-3, the *shu*-stream point and yuan-source point of the Liver channel, has the function of spreading the *qi*. Together they are able to activate the *qi* and blood and ensure their free and smooth passage...’ (Deadman, Al-Khafaji, & Baker, 1998, p. 105). More than this entry, it is difficult to find other explanations or commentaries for this combination. However, if we look at the UAT model and the aforementioned story, the Four Gates can be seen in a different light and as part of a wider approach.

The classical indication is for painful obstruction which can be of either a physical or psycho-emotional nature. So, the question arises as to why it treats psycho-emotional imbalances and which types it is indicated for. Using the creation story of the Six Elements we can analyse this point combination relationship and better understand its clinical application. The two points, LI *he gu* and LIV 3 *tai chong* are both yuan-source points and *tai chong* is also a *shu*-stream point as well as an Earth point.

LI 4 *he gu* is on the Hand *yang ming* channel and is associated with the element Metal. Which is the *yang* channel of the Metal element which is *yang* in origin and manifests *yin*. The *yang* channel in a *yang* element is closer to the origin of the *yang* element than the *yin* organ is. Conversely, LIV 3 *tai chong* is on the *jue yin* channel and is associated with the Wood element. Wood's origin is *yin*, and its manifestation is *yang*. The *yin* channel is closer to the origin of *yin* nature of the Wood element. The points that are chosen on these channels are the yuan-source points. LI 4 *he gu* is on the yuan-source point of the *yang* channel in Metal, and LIV 3 *tai chong* is the yuan-source point of the *yin* channel in Wood. Yuan-source points are described as follows: ‘Their name indicates “Productive power of Heaven and Earth”, “Origin” or “Source”. They use the energy from the “Centre”, which could either mean Pre-Heaven or Post-Heaven centres. According to the *Nan Jing*, yuan=Source/original *qi* is stored in the space between

the Kidneys. *San Jiao*=Triple Warmer is the envoy of *yuan qi* and helps disseminate it.’ (Montakab, 2014, p. 27). The *yuan qi* is representing Heaven and Earth's most primordial interplay in the body and is like a reminder of the original function of the channel and organ. The yuan-source points (where *yuan qi* flows and is heavenly in its nature) and the *yin* channel of the Wood element and the *yang* channel of the *yang* element. So, this combination will remind Wood and Metal of their relationship together.

Including the creation story to examine the interaction of these two points, it can be seen that they are used to help the Emissaries communicate with each other. As they are Emissaries, they are responsible for the day-to-day problems that arise. Each one is living in the other's domain and is there to communicate with the foreign domain's Ruler. And they also communicate with each other and manage the day-to-day mundane aspects. And that is the key here. We can use this combination when the day-to-day mundane aspects of life are overwhelming. Using LI 4 *he gu* and LIV 3 *tai chong* helps the person accept the current situation that is causing them distress and put it into a larger context.

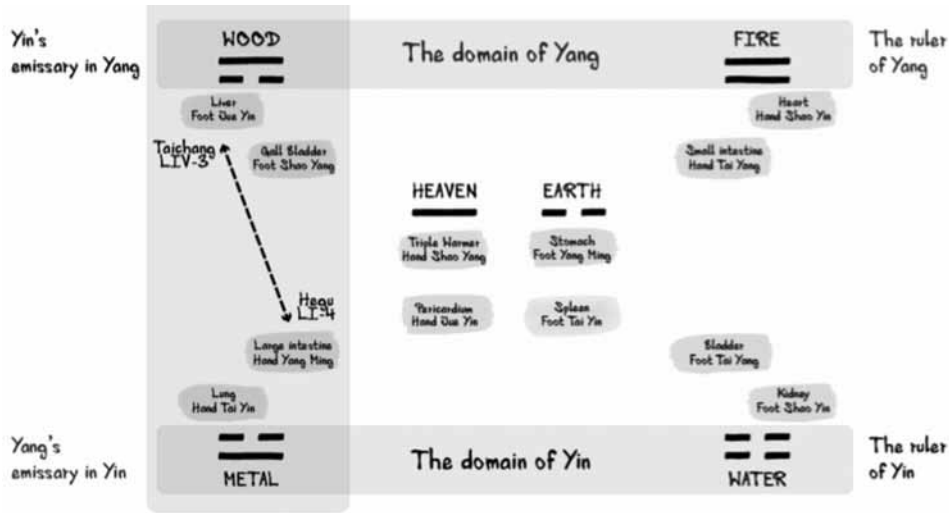
The structural aspect of how these channels interact is rooted in the amount of sunlight they are exposed to. This is referred to as system 6, Exposure to Sunlight, in the Unified Acupuncture Theory model. The channel that gets the medium amount of sun on the *yin* aspect of the leg interacts with the channel that gets the medium amount of sun on the *yang* aspect of the arm<sup>1</sup> (Image 6).

These two points together are the traditional Four Gates, and in this model, they are named the Four Gates of the Emissaries. Using the UAT model there are two other pairings that can be used. These other two pairings are the Four Gates of the Rulers and the Four Gates of the Origins. They follow the same logic as the Emissary Gates in how the points are chosen and with slight variations as their clinical application differs.

The Ruler of the domain of *yang* is Fire, and the Ruler of the domain of *yin* is Water. In the domain of *yang*, we have Fire. Fire

<sup>1</sup> The idea of the channel names representing the amounts of sun they are exposed to is discussed in this author's book *Sun's Season of the Channels*, chapter 15.

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originates in *yang* and manifests *yang*. Applying the logic of the Emissary gates, the *yang* channel will be its strongest voice of Fire as it is based in *yang* and the *yang* channel in Fire is hand *tai yang* Small Intestine. The *yuan*-source point on the Hand *tai yang* Small Intestine channel is SI 4 *wan gu*.

In the domain of *yin* Water is the Ruler. Water originates is *yin* and manifests *yin*. The *yin* channel will be its strongest voice of *yin* and the *yin* channel in Water is Foot *shao yin* Kidney. The *yuan*-source point of the Foot *shao yin* Kidney channel is point Ki 3 *tai xi*.

The combination of points for Gates of the Rulers are SI 4 *wan gu* and Ki 3 *tai xi*. And the channels of Hand *tai yang* Small Intestine and Foot *shao yin* Kidney interact using system three 'closed Circuit Channels' of the UAT model where the back *yin* channel of the leg interacts with the back *yang* channel of the arm (Image 7).

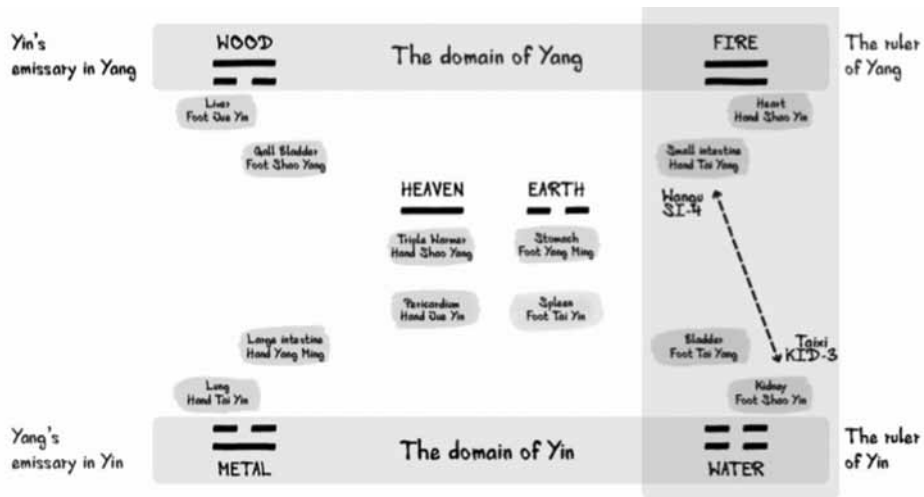
When Rulers of different domains meet, it is for important problems that the Emissaries could not find a solution to. This

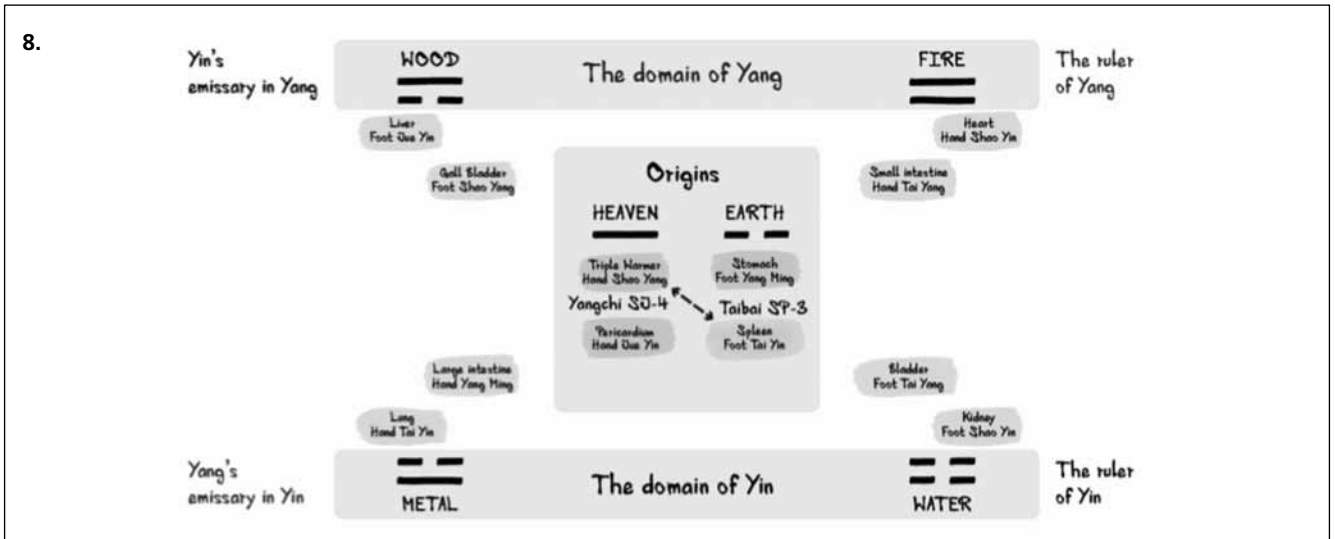
is when the big structural problems of life itself are coming up and the authority of Rulers needs to be called upon. These are psycho-emotional problems that date back to when the person was younger and was still building the foundations of their relationship with the world. These are the deeper, underlying issues that were not resolved at the time and have been left to accumulate for many years. This can be very useful in working with childhood trauma or developmental issues of the patient.

The Emissaries are about the day-to-day problems that overwhelm the patient, the Rulers are about the older and deeper problems or situations.

The third set of gates, the most internal or ethereal in nature, are the Gates of Origin. These are the elements of Heaven and Earth. Heaven is the origin of *yang* and the *yang* channel associated with it is the Hand *shao yang* Triple Warmer. Earth is the origin of *yin* and the *yin* channel associated with it is the Foot *tai yin* Spleen. The *yuan*-source point of each is SJ 4 *yang chi* and

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Sp 3 *tai bai* and the channel interaction between them is a relationship from the UAT system 5. These two channels have a relationship of Biorhythm opposites. Hand *shao yang San Jiao* is at its peak time between 9-11 p.m. and Foot *tai yin* Spleen is at its peak time between 9-11 a.m.

SJ 4 *yang chi* and Sp 3 *tai bai* are the Gates of Origin. As was previously mentioned, the *yuan qi* flows through the *San Jiao* and here we are using the *yuan*-source of the Hand *shao yang San Jiao* channel, it could be said that it is the *yuan*-source point of *yuan qi* itself. The point connecting to Heaven here is very strongly rooted in *yuan*-source *qi*.

Alternately, Sp 3 *tai bai* has a complementary abundance of *yin* and Earth. The *yuan*-source points on the *yin* channels are also the *shu*-stream points and the *shu*-stream points on the *yin* channels are associated with the element Earth. So Sp 3 *tai bai* is not only the *yuan*-source point, but also the Earth point of Earth.

These two points together are the Heaven point of Heaven and the Earth point of Earth. This is why we call this gate the Gates of Origin (Image 8).

**Table 1**

Name of gate	Emissary	Ruler	Origin
<i>yin yuan</i> -source point	Liv 3 <i>tai chong</i>	Ki 3 <i>tai xi</i>	Sp 3 <i>tai bai</i>
<i>yang yuan</i> -source point	Li 4 <i>he gu</i>	Si 4 <i>wan gu</i>	SJ 4 <i>yang chi</i>
Channel interactions	Foot <i>jue yin</i> Liver with Hand <i>yang ming</i> Large Intestine	Foot <i>shao yin</i> Kidney with Hand <i>tai yang</i> Small Intestine	Foot <i>tai yin</i> Spleen with Hand <i>shao yang San Jiao</i>
UAT System	6	3	5
Interacting elements	Wood and Metal	Fire and Water	Heaven and Earth
Interacting <i>shen</i> aspects	<i>hun</i> and <i>po</i>	<i>shen</i> and <i>zhi</i>	<i>yi</i>
Family analogy	Siblings	Parents (mother and father)	Ancestors
Type of trauma	Mundane day-to-day	Early Childhood	Transgenerational

The Gates of Origin are reminding the primordial forces of *yin* and *yang* in the body of their mutual and dynamic interaction. This can be useful during deep and profound questioning of oneself and during spiritual awakening and crisis. This is not a Gate that should be used too often as it contains the most precious of our inner beings and the basic imprint of the universe. In the clinic, it can be used after a person has worked through their trauma and is ready to move on to the next stage of their journey. This can also be used for what is called transgenerational trauma. This is trauma that is passed on from one generation to another.

To make this a bit clearer, let us look at the three different gates and how they could be used (Table 1).

**CASE STUDIES**  
**Case Study 1**

A 37-year-old woman presented with headaches on the left side of the head and tension in the trapeze areas on both sides (on the Foot *shao yang* Gall Bladder channel). She is angry about how people treat her at work and cannot stop thinking about how she was wronged. As she can't stop thinking, it is difficult for her to fall asleep.

We first treated the headache using channel interactions and holography with placing needles on the right Hand *shao yin* Heart

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channel from Ht 5 *tong li* to Ht 8 *shao fu*. We placed needles on all *ashi* points in this area. After the placement of these needles the headache subsided and the tension relaxed. We then added the Emissary Gates Liv 3 *tai chong* and LI 4 *he gu*. This helped her move out of the cycle of thinking about the problems at work and calmed her down.

On the next visit her headache was better but still there. The main change was that she was not stuck in the mental cycle of thinking about the problems at work. We were now able to talk about times in the past where she felt the same injustice and anger. She revealed that as a child she constantly felt that her brother was given more attention by her parents and found this very unjust.

During this treatment, we used the same needles for the headache and changed the gates to the Ruler Gates Ki 3 *tai xi* and SI 4 *wan gu*.

These treatments were repeated for three sessions at a frequency of once per week. The patient reported that the headaches and tension had stopped and that she was able to fall asleep easier. She also started to talk to her family about how she felt as a child and started to have other memories of her childhood that were not in line with the story of her parents giving her brother more attention. As a result of this she started to work with a psychologist to work on her underlying emotional states and past trauma.

The Emissary Gates helped the patient get past the mundane story of her work problems and allowed her to see that the real feelings of injustice were rooted in her childhood. The Ruler Gates helped her to access the childhood trauma and start to process it. I think it is great that she then went to get support for understanding her past trauma.

It is very important that as acupuncturists we work in a collaborative way with other healthcare professionals. Treatments that are dealing with emotional trauma can bring up many emotions and memories and the patient needs to be supported in navigating them.

## Case study 2

A 77-year-old male presented with extreme fatigue and vertigo when walking or standing for periods of time. He had already seen many health professionals (an ENT specialist, a neurologist, and an osteopath) with no diagnosis or improvement. When we talked more, he revealed that he spends many hours on social media doing what he called 'keyboard warrior work' which meant arguing with people. He also talked about his childhood, growing up as a white child in a country with apartheid, and witnessing injustice and cruelty to the black community. This childhood experience of seeing repetitive abuse of power and cruelty left a strong impact on him. He felt it was his responsibility to fight and fix the world.

The first treatment was simply doing the Ruler Gates Ki 3 *tai xi* and SI 4 *wan gu*. Immediately after the treatment the vertigo lessened.

On the next visit he reported that he was no longer tired when walking or standing and that there was almost no vertigo. We continued this treatment for three weeks at a frequency of once per week. We also talked about how he felt as a child and how there was no one for him to talk to about it when it happened.

After a month of treatment, the patient was using social media less. He was still engaged in his social justice work, however, was not as emotionally affected. We then used the Origin Gates treatment Sp 3 *tai bai* and SJ 4 *yang chi* to help the patient connect to a deeper part of himself and help heal the transgenerational trauma of being born into an unjust society. After the Origin Gates, a sense of compassion and understanding for himself as well as their ancestors developed.

## SUMMARY

In the beginning there was the Void. From the Void came into existence two complementary and opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* settled as Earth and *yang* floated as Heaven. From these two primordial forces were born two rulers. Fire the Ruler of *yang* and Water the Ruler of *yin*. Fire then created an Emissary to represent the domain of *yang* in the domain of *yin* and called it Metal. Water created an Emissary to represent the domain of *yin* in the domain of *yang* and called it Wood.

Wood and Metal are both Emissaries and when the *yuan*-source points of the *yang* channel for the *yang* element and the *yin* channel for the *yin* element are used together these are the Emissary Gates LI 4 *he gu* and Liv 3 *tai chong*. This gate is used for helping with mundane day-to-day problems that are overwhelming. In a family it would be like two siblings that when they are in disaccord they fight and when they are in harmony they get along well.

Fire and Water are the Rulers and when the *yuan*-source points of the *yang* channel for the *yang* element and the *yin* channel for the *yin* element are used together these are the Ruler Gates SI 4 *wan gu* and Ki 3 *tai xi*. This gate is used to help people who are working with early trauma and if it were in a family, it would be the parents who need to be able to communicate to help take care of the children and the whole family.

Heaven and Earth are at the origin of it all. And when the *yuan*-source points of the *yang* channel for the *yang* element and the *yin* channel for the *yin* element are used together these are the Origin Gates SJ 4 *yang chi* and Sp 3 *tai bai*. This gate is used to help integrate trauma that has already been processed or for transgenerational trauma. In the family this would be the grandparents or the ancestors.

**Acknowledgement:** The author wishes to thank Christina Malouf for permission to use her diagrams to illustrate this article.

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