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Guest editorial: Dòu Cǎi
(寶材 c.1076 – 1146 CE)

One should understand the channels and network vessels

Introduction and translation by Lorraine Wilcox

Dòu Cǎi lived in the Southern Sòng dynasty. He was from Zhēndìng (in present-day Héběi province) but lived elsewhere as a military official. Dòu wrote one book, *The Book of Bianquè's Heart-Mind* (扁鵲心書 *Biǎnquè Xīn Shū*), which has three main volumes plus an appendix of "Divine Formulas".

DÒU WAS A strong proponent of warm supplementation, using herbs and moxibustion. He did not discuss acupuncture. Usually, scholars date the school of warm supplementation (溫補 *wēnbǔ*) to Míng dynasty doctors such as 薛己 Xuē Jǐ and 張介賓 Zhāng Jièbīn, so Dòu was ahead of his time in this regard.

Dòu had many unusual ideas that never became mainstream. He would prescribe hundreds of cones of moxibustion for a point and include an anaesthetic formula so heavy moxibustion could be performed on sensitive patients. His point selection was interesting, but the fascinating thing about Dòu was his claim to have received a mind-transmission from ancient god-like doctor Biǎnquè, hence the name of his book. In a chapter called "The Three Generations of Biǎnquè"¹, Dòu wrote:

我獨得傳，乃扁鵲再出也。故自號扁鵲，第三扁鵲，大宋寶材是也。

1. 《三世扁鵲》

I alone received the transmission and then became the re-emergence of Biǎnquè. Thus, I call myself Biǎnquè, the third Biǎnquè, Dòu Cǎi of the Great Sòng dynasty.

Dòu also had disdain for the usual medical sages. For example, his preface says:

《靈》、《素》為醫家正傳，後世張仲景、王叔和、孫思邈、孫兆、初虞世、朱肱，皆不師《內經》，惟採本草諸書，各以己見自成一家之技，治小疾則可，治大病不效矣。

Língshū and *Sùwèn* are the true transmission of skilled doctors. In later generations, Zhāng Zhòngjǐng, Wáng Shūhé, Sūn Sīmǎo, Sūn Zhào, Chū Yúshì, and Zhū Gōng²—none of them were masters of *Nèijīng*. They only gathered various *běncǎo* books. Each of them used their own views and founded their own schools. They could treat minor illness

2. These were all earlier doctors, some still quite famous and others almost lost to history.



The Lantern is a journal of Chinese medicine and its related fields with an emphasis on the traditional view and its relevance to clinic. Our aim is to encourage access to the vast resources in this tradition of preserving and restoring health, whether via translations of works of past centuries or observations from our own generation working with these techniques. The techniques are many, but the traditional perspective of the human as an integral part, indeed a reflection, of the social, meteorological and cosmic matrix remains one. We wish to foster that view.

but were not effective in treating serious disease.

It is quite shocking to read an opinion that Zhāng Zhòngjǐng or Sūn Sīmǎo could not treat serious disease! To understand the following translation, we need to review some legendary history. Volume 105 of *The Historical Record*³ tells the story of how Biǎnquè became a god-like doctor. Before he was called Biǎnquè, the young man was an innkeeper. An old man named Cháng Sāng often stayed at the inn. These two recognised something special in each other, though others thought them unremarkable. After 10 years staying regularly at the inn, the old man took Biǎnquè aside and gave him some texts with an instruction to not disclose this information. Cháng Sāng also offered Biǎnquè a secret formula to be cooked with water that had never touched the ground. The old man then disappeared, as if he were an immortal. Biǎnquè drank the herbs for 30 days. After that, he could see through walls or into people's bodies. Biǎnquè went on to become a famous travelling doctor, and used pulse, rather than his magical ability, to diagnose patients.

This is the first short essay from Volume 1 of *The Book of Bianquè's Heart-Mind*.

《當明經絡》

One should understand the channels and network vessels

諺云：「學醫不知經絡，開口動手便錯。」蓋經絡不明，無以識病證之根源，究陰陽之傳變。如傷寒三陰三陽，皆有部署，百病十二經脈可定死生。既講明其經絡，然後用藥徑達其處，方能奏效。

There is a saying that someone who studies medicine without knowing the channels and network vessels will make a mistake as soon as they open their mouths or move their hands. If the channels and network vessels are not understood, the doctor will be unable to recognise the origin of the disease or investigate the passage and mutation⁴ of yīn and yáng [through the six channels]. For example, the three yīn and the three yáng [channel-stages] of cold-damage⁵ each has

3. 司馬遷《史記》 Shǐjì by Simǎ Qiān (Hàn).

4. 傳變 *chuánbiàn* passage and mutation: In cold damage theory, passage and mutation is the transfer of an evil from one channel to the next or the progression of a condition into one of its sub-types.

5. This could refer to the book 《傷寒論》 *Shānghán*

its own jurisdiction so the hundred diseases and the 12 channel-vessels can determine life or death. Once the channels and network vessels are understood, the medicines that are used will directly reach the affected site and the formula will prove effective.

昔人望而知病者，不過熟其經絡故也。俗傳遇長桑居，授以懷中藥，飲以上池之水，能洞見臟腑，此虛言耳。

The reason that ancient people could observe a patient and know his condition is that they were deeply familiar with the channels and network vessels. According to tradition, [I, Biǎnquè] met Cháng Sāng who gave [me] medicine he held close to his chest. Once [I] cooked it with water of the upper pool⁶ and drank it, [I] was able to see the organs clearly. This is just empty talk!⁷

今人不明經絡，止讀藥性病機，故無能別病所在。漫將藥試，偶對稍愈，便爾居功，況亦未必全愈；若一不對，反生他病，此皆不知經絡故也。

Modern people do not understand the channels and network vessels.⁸ They study only the nature of the herbs⁹ and disease mechanisms, so are incapable differentiating the location of the disease. If someone who casually experiments with herbs just happens to be correct, there may be slight improvement. The doctor will claim credit for himself, but there will not be complete recovery. If the treatment is incorrect, contrary to expectations, it will make the disease worse. The reason for this is because he does not know the channels and network vessels.¹⁰

Lùn (Discussion of Cold Damage) or more generally to the cold damage category of disease.

6. "Water of the upper pool" is said to refer to rainwater that has never touched the earth..

7. Dòu appears to be channeling Biǎnquè in this paragraph. He calls this legend "empty talk" because Biǎnquè knew the channels and network vessels so thoroughly that he could diagnose the location of disease with an accuracy that seemed magical.

8. This comment about 'modern people' was made during the Sòng dynasty. Imagine how much worse we must be today!

9. "The nature of the herbs" means their taste and thermal properties. This was written decades before 張元素 Zhāng Yuǎnsù (ca 1180) first started writing about herbs entering channels. Therefore, this essay does not discuss entering channels; it is about six channel theory, or perhaps some early intermediary stage between the two.

10. i.e. Even if a script has beneficial herbs, doctors won't know how to harness the herbal power unless they understand the channels and network vessels.

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If someone who casually experiments with herbs just happens to be correct, there may be slight improvement.

■ Lorraine Wilcox is a practitioner of Chinese medicine who lives in Los Angeles. She translates ancient Chinese medical books and experiments with making herbal formulas from these old texts. Her translations are published by The Chinese Medicine Database.