

# The Heavenly Star Points of Ma Danyang

## Abstract

According to the Heavenly Star Poem (first recorded in Wang Guorui's Yuan Dynasty *Jade Dragon Classic's Echo of Bian Que Deity's Acupuncture*), 'None of the functions of the 360 points are beyond the 11 [Heavenly Star] points'. The same poem states that the clinical effects of using these points can be like 'like hot water poured upon snow'. This article explains the history and textual transmission of the Heavenly Star Points of Ma Danyang, and includes comprehensive descriptions of the application of the points and the needling techniques necessary to produce the desired clinical effects.

Each us begins our clinical internships in different ways; mine began with being instructed to use Ma Danyang's Heavenly Star points exclusively. I was told that until I learned how to locate these points correctly, understand their functions completely, and needle them effectively there was no reason to attempt to treat any other point on the body. After all, as the Heavenly Star Poem states, 'None of the functions of the 360 points are beyond the 11 [Heavenly Star] points'. Only when satisfied with my clinical progress in using these points was I encouraged to include others - but always from the foundation of what I had learned from treating the Heavenly Star points.

Born in the Jin Dynasty, Ma Danyang (馬丹陽 金 1123–1183) was first and foremost a Daoist teacher, and secondarily a practitioner of Chinese medicine famous for his acupuncture skills. China had lost its sovereignty during the Jin dynasty and was being ruled by invading Tartars from the north. The Jin and subsequent Yuan dynasty (during which time China continued to be ruled by foreigners - this time the Mongols) saw a flourishing of Chinese medicine writings as talented people like Ma Danyang - who would normally have been involved in courtly life - sought refuge in scholarly pursuits. Their attention was drawn to China's arts and they felt responsible for ensuring the survival of existing knowledge and protecting its integrity in the face of foreign rule. Ma Danyang was an influential and prolific voice of his time, although there are no records of him actually writing the poem for which he is now best remembered.

## The Heavenly Star Poem

The Heavenly Star Poem was first recorded in the Yuan Dynasty in Wang Guorui's (王國瑞, 1279–1368) *Jade Dragon Classic's Echo of Bian Que Deity's*

*Acupuncture*, more commonly known in English as the *Ode to the Jade Dragon* (扁鵲神應針灸玉龍經). Although the poem is attributed to Ma Danyang, it was more likely penned by Wang himself. Wang sets the tone for his book in his preface, which I translate as follows:

*Bian Que passed on to me the Song of the Jade Dragon,  
The Jade Dragon - once applied all illnesses are  
completely healed;*

*The Song of the Jade Dragon is rarely to be found  
today,*

*Studied with a true heart one's hands will make no  
mistakes;*

*I put into song this Ode to the Jade Dragon,*

*The Jade Dragon [contains] 120 points;*

*The application of the needles are mysterious, magical  
and without comparison,*

*But I fear the people of today are not like that;*

*Tonification and dispersal is differentiated by what is  
done with the fingers,*

*The metal needle upon insertion shows [who is a] good  
doctor.*

*The bent and hunched stand straight and the bedridden  
rise,*

*From this [skill] one's fame will be known from the  
lakes to the oceans.*

扁鵲授我玉龍歌，玉龍一試痊沉。  
玉龍之歌世罕得，研精心手無差訛。  
吾今歌此玉龍訣，玉龍一百二十穴。  
行針殊絕妙無比，但恐時人自差別。  
補瀉分明指下施，金針一刺顯良醫。  
僂者立伸患者起，從此名馳湖海知。

Wang's preface emphasises the following ideas:

- that this text represents a transmission of great skill from the most famous of practitioners;

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Dragon.*

- that this knowledge is hard to come by and requires / deserves great effort to study;
- that the skills imparted are without equal (but require the effort mentioned above);
- that practitioners today do not make this effort and thus do not have the requisite skill;
- that the skill lies in actively tonifying and dispersing the points with the correct needle technique;
- that the skill of the doctor becomes obvious the moment the needle is inserted;
- that this skill will mean the sick are cured and thus the doctor will become famous.

It is important to understand Wang's preface, as these beliefs resurface in the Heavenly Star Poem itself. A loose translation of Wang's Heavenly Star Poem is as follows:

*San Li [ST-36] Neiting [ST-44] points,  
Quchi (L.I.-11), Hegu [L.I.-4] penetrated,  
Weizhong [BL-40] paired with Chengshan [BL-57],  
Huantiao [GB-30] and Yanglingquan [GB-34],  
Tongli [HE-5] and Lieque [LU-7],  
If used in tandem the method is tandem,  
If used alone the method is alone,  
With a dedicated heart remember this,  
Do not with the lazy speak of it,  
360 points are not as good as 11 points,  
This method few people know,  
All locks are opened from their doors,  
The moment the needle treats the illness,  
The results are like hot water poured upon snow.  
To the unscrupulous do not pass this on,  
Keep yourself from slipping the secrets of nature.*

天星十一穴歌訣 元王國瑞《扁鵲神應針灸玉龍經》  
三裡內庭穴，曲池合谷微，委中配承山，下至昆侖絕，  
環跳與陽陵，通裡與列缺，合擔用法擔，合截用法截，  
專心常記此，莫與閑人說，三百六十穴，不如十一穴，  
此法少人知，金鎖都門微，將針治病患，有如湯沃雪，  
非人莫傳與，休把天機泄

With the restitution of Chinese sovereignty during the Ming Dynasty and the widespread use of printing blocks, scholars set about gathering many of the existing writings on Chinese medicine into large volumes. The importance of the *Ode to the Jade Dragon* cannot be underestimated, as the Heavenly Star Poem appears in every compendium of acupuncture that followed, albeit with minor changes that place more or less stress on the efficacy of the points and the need to keep the knowledge secret. Chronologically therefore we have the following:

1) Ma Danyang - a famous Jin dynasty Daoist known for his acupuncture skills.

2) Over 100 years later during the Yuan Dynasty Wang Guorui publishes the Heavenly Star Poem for the first known time in his *Ode to the Jade Dragon*.

3) In 1439, over 100 years after Wang's text was published, Xu Feng (徐風, 1439) includes the poem in his *Ming Complete Collection*, adding Taichong LIV-3 so that the points now number 12 and slightly changing the verse as follows:

*Sanli Neiting points,  
Quchi Hegu connecting,  
Weizhong paired with Chengshan,  
Taichong Kunlun points,  
Huantiao and Yangling,  
Tongli and also Lieque,  
If used in tandem the method is tandem,  
If used alone the method is alone,  
The 360 points are not beyond the poem of 12,  
In treating illness the results are like magic,  
As effective as hot water splashed upon snow,  
As the big dipper sinks the auspicious moment appears,  
The locks of every door are opened,  
It can be passed to the worthy,  
[But] to the unworthy do not divulge these words.*

針灸大全 明 徐鳳  
三裡內庭穴，曲池合谷接，委中配承山，太衝昆侖穴，  
環跳與陽陵，通裡并列缺，合擔用法擔，合截用法截，  
三百六十穴，不出十二訣，治病如神靈，渾如湯潑雪，  
北斗降真機，金鎖教開微，至人可傳授，匪人莫浪說。

4) In 1529 Gao Wu includes the poem in his *Glorious Anthology* (針灸聚英 明 高武) - also a Ming dynasty text but almost 100 years later than Xu Feng and now over 300 years from Ma Danyang. His version is more traditional in that it lists the original 11 points, but he makes further changes to the poem (although he lists the clinical applications of all 12 points in a second poem which is discussed further below):

*Sanli Neiting points,  
Quchi Hegu separated,  
Weizhong paired with Chengshan,  
Go downward to Kunlun point,  
Huantiao and Yangling,  
Tongli and also Lieque,  
If used in tandem the method is tandem,  
If used alone the method is alone,  
Use of tandem or alone should be constantly remembered,  
To the idle do not heedlessly tell of this,  
The 365 points are not beyond the 11,  
This method few people know,  
All locks are broken open,  
For treating illness they show powerful results,*

*Like hot water splashed upon snow,  
If those studying meticulously seek [these results],  
Miraculous skills [develop] without limit.*

薛真人天星十一穴歌 針灸聚英 明高武  
三裡內庭穴，曲池合谷截，委中配承山，下至昆侖穴，  
環跳及陽陵，通裡并列缺，合擔用法擔，合截用法截，  
擔截常記取，非人莫浪說，三百六十五，不出十一穴，  
此法少人知，金鎖都開徹，治病顯奇功，有如湯潑雪，  
學者細推尋，神功無盡竭。

5) Over 70 years after Gao at the end of the Ming dynasty, in 1601 Yang Jizhou publishes the *Great Compendium* (針灸大成 明 楊繼洲), which includes 12 points and returns to listing the poem as written by Xu Feng. We are now just shy of 500 years from Ma Danyang.

6) In 2001 Deadman et al.'s *A Manual of Acupuncture*<sup>1</sup> is published in English, following the 12 point idea of Xu Feng but rearranging the order of the points to follow the sequence of channel flow starting with the Lung - thus following a modern learning method instead of the pattern laid out in the poem.

To summarise therefore, we actually have no idea if Ma Danyang himself emphasised these points as the most important points of all. We do know that he was famous for his acupuncture skills and this is likely why the gathering of these powerful points is attributed to him. Regardless of whether or not Ma himself felt they were important, however, their importance as primary points for clinical treatment has stood the test of time. They are still arguably the most common points used in point protocols today and a quick glance at the traditional point combinations listed in Deadman et al.'s *Manual* sees at least one of them listed on almost every line.

## The points

Why are these 12 points so important? Firstly, except for Huantiao GB-30, all are at or distal to the elbow/knee joint, putting them in the safe zone of the 66 points<sup>2</sup> (and of course if you are going to needle the body Huantiao GB-30 is also a very safe place to do so). Secondly, the pattern of the points in the poem allows one to access all six channel 'layers', as follows:

1. Yangming channel: 2 points on the arm, 2 on the leg.
2. Taiyang channel: 3 points on the leg.
3. Jueyin channel (if we count Taichong LIV-3): 1 point on the leg.
4. Shaoyang channel: 2 points on the arm.
5. Shaoyin channel: 1 point on the arm.
6. Taiyin channel: 1 point on the arm.

We therefore have 12 points that are safe to needle and that can affect all of the channels, whether yin or yang.

The traditional functions of the points are described in a second poem from Gao Wu's *Glorious Anthology*, as follows:<sup>3</sup>

**Sanli [ST-36]** below the eye of the knee, three cun between the tendons. Able to flow the centre and treat abdominal distension; beneficial for treating cold in the Stomach; borborygmus and also diarrhoea; swelling and soreness of the leg, shin and knee; damage [left over from] shang han illness and emaciation from starvation; abdominal swelling and all similar conditions; once past the age of thirty, moxibustion and needling gives brightness to the eyes.

**Neiting [ST-44]** outside the second toe, it belongs to the foot yangming. It can treat reversal of the four limbs; [for the patient who] seeks quiet, and shuns conversation and noise; chronic sore throat; frequent yawning and also toothache; inability to eat due to qi deficiency; upon needling everything awakens.

**Quchi [L.I.-11]** seek by flexing the arm; with a bent elbow seek along the bone. Beneficial for treating pain in the elbow; inability to retract the arm due to hemiplegia; inability to draw back a bow; flaccidity of the tendons thus unable to comb through the hair; throat bi that seems like death; emitting heat and unable to rest in the middle of the night; scabies/ringworm throughout the body; when needled recovery is quick.

**Hegu [L.I.-4]** is at the tiger's mouth, in between the bones of the two fingers. [It can treat] bone pain and also swollen face; malarial diseases with heat and cold exchanging; tooth decay, blood spouting from the nose; lockjaw and unable to speak; the needle enters five fen deep, guiding the person to immediate calm.

**Weizhong [BL-40]** look within the bend, centred at the blood vessel within the crease. [It can treat] back pain and thus being unable to rise; heaviness that is bending the lower spine; sore and painful tendons, unable to straighten the leg; wind bi occurring unpredictably; difficulty extending or bending the patella; the needle enters, calm and health appear.

**Chengshan [BL-57]** is known as the fish belly, in between the muscles of the calf. Beneficial for treating pains of the lower back; haemorrhoids and difficult defecation; leg qi and also swollen knees; soreness, pain and trembling when extending [the leg]; cholera-like illnesses and muscle-knotting; stimulating into the middle of the point creates calm.

**Taichong [LIV-3]** by the big toe, penetrate two cun behind the joint. From its artery we know life or death; it can cure fright seizures and epilepsy-like convulsions; swelling of the throat and middle; both legs being unable to move; the seven shan disorders with dropping-heaviness [of the testicle] to one side; cloudy vision; also treats lower back pain; miraculous results happen once the needle is inserted.

**Kunlun [BL-60]** at the outside ankle, seek above the heel. [It can treat] muscle knotting and coccyx pain; sudden shortness of breath with a fullness and rushing sensation to the heart; unable to walk when stepping; moaning and groaning upon movement; if desiring [a return to] smoothness and steadiness, you must needle at this point.

**Huantiao [GB-30]** is at the pivot of the femur, seek by lying on the side with a bent leg. [It can treat] being bent at the back, and unable to rotate the head; cold wind and also damp bi; pain in the leg from hip to calf; repeated sighing in grief when turning; once a person is needled, the pain immediately disappears.

**Yangling [GB-34]** belongs below the knee, penetrate outside the corner by one cun. [It can treat] heaviness of the knee with numbness and tingling; cold bi and hemiplegia; able to lift the leg but unable to get up: seeming like an old man when sitting or lying down; the needle enters six fen then stops, the healing results are miraculous without limit.

**Tongli [HE-5]** behind the wrist bone, penetrate at one cun five fen. [It can be used if there is] desire to speak but [the patient is] unable to emit sound; vexed irritation and depression; in excess the four limbs are heavy, the head, cheeks and cheekbones red; in deficiency there is inability to eat, with sudden muteness and a lustreless complexion; with a fine needle lightly stimulate, trust that there will be miraculous results.

**Lieque [LU-7]** above the side of the wrist, where the index finger would cross. Beneficial in treating one sided headaches; wind bi numbness throughout the body; phlegm and spittle leaking through closed teeth; if one can obviously tonify or disperse it [these conditions] can be mastered with a smooth hand.

三里在膝下，三寸兩筋間。能通心腹脹，善治胃中寒，腸鳴並泄瀉，腿脛膝腫痠，傷寒羸瘦損，氣蠱及諸般。年過三旬後，針灸眼有光。

內廷次指外，本屬足陽明。能治四肢厥，喜靜惡聞聲，癰疹咽喉痛，數欠及牙疼，氣虛不能食，針著便惺惺。曲池拱手取，屈肘骨邊求。善治肘中痛，偏風手不收，挽弓開不得，筋緩莫梳頭，喉痺從欲死，發熱更無休，偏身風癱癱，針著即時廖。

合谷在虎口，兩指岐骨間。骨疼并面腫，瘡病熱還寒，齒齲鼻衄血，口噤不開言，針入五分深，令人即便安。

委中曲腓里，橫紋脈中央。腰痛不能舉，沉沉引脊梁，痠疼筋痠展，風痺發無常，膝頭難伸屈，針入即安康。

承山名魚腹，腓腿分肉間。善治腰疼痛，痔疾大便難，腳氣並膝腫，輾轉戰疼痠，霍亂及轉筋，穴中刺便安。

太沖足大指，節後二寸中。動脈知生死，能醫驚癇風，咽喉並心脹，兩足不能動，七疝偏墜腫，眼目似雲蒙，亦能療腰痛，針下有神功。

崑崙足外踝，跟骨上邊尋。轉筋腰尻痛，暴喘滿沖心，舉步行不得，一動即呻吟，若欲求安穩，須於此穴針。環跳在髀樞，側臥屈足取。腰折莫能顧，冷風並濕痺，腿膀連端痛，轉則重嗟呼，若人針灸後，頃刻痛消除。

陽陵歸膝下，外廉一寸中。膝重並麻木，冷痺及偏風，舉足不能起，坐臥似衰翁，針入六分止，醫功妙不窮。

通里腕骨後，一寸五分中。欲言聲不出，懊鉢及怔忡，實則四肢重，頭腮面頰紅，虛則不能食，暴暗面無容，毫針微微刺，方信有神功。

列缺腕側上，次指手交叉。善療偏頭患，遍身風痺麻，痰涎頻壅口，口噤不開牙，若能明補瀉，應手即如拿。

When reading through this list of functions, it is important that we do not see merely a list of symptoms that can be treated using particular points. Rather we should see the symptoms as manifestations of deficiency or excess, and the points as vehicles through which to treat such disharmony; properly done this will resolve the presenting symptom or condition. Because of this, it is extremely important to choose the appropriate treatment principle and technique – i.e. tonification or dispersal – to achieve the desired results (as opposed to simply inserting the needle at a point and expecting the symptom to be miraculously be resolved).

### Application of the points

As well as point functions, we should consider the second half of the Heavenly Star Poem, which deals with the application of the points and admonishes that genuine transmission must be given in order to achieve results like 'hot water poured upon snow'. Although the Heavenly Star points themselves are not secret, and this poem has been available since the Yuan Dynasty for all to read, the therapeutic actions of these points do not just happen by themselves. One must set out to create the actions of the points through proper needle technique, which requires learning from a teacher who has this skill, and who considers the student worthy of receiving it. Although the traditional needling techniques (such as Burning the Mountain, Cooling the Sky, White Tiger Rocks its Head etc.) are important, it is not the technique itself that makes the intervention tonifying or dispersing, but how one does the technique. Without this important understanding, even classic techniques can be rendered passive interventions. Thus the most important part of obtaining results like 'hot water poured upon snow' is whether one is giving active (rather than passive) treatments. Although demonstrating the requisite hand skill can only be done in person, the complexities of tonifying and dispersing can be explained here. With this skill, instead of simply inserting needles at the Heavenly Star points and hoping for miraculous effects to happen, you intentionally follow a strategy of tonification or dispersal in order to create the effects as described in the poem.

### Tonification and dispersal

Tonification and dispersal are the yin and yang of affecting qi in the body. Just as yin and yang contain each other, so do tonification and dispersal. Thus, our treatment



must usually contain both in order to effectively treat imbalance. Using both, however, should not be confused with the technique of regulating qi that is often called a 'balancing' or 'even' technique (using the same amount of tonifying and dispersing to create an 'even' effect on the qi). Thus, when strategising needling, practitioners must decide if they want to:

- tonify to tonify,
- tonify to disperse,
- disperse to disperse or
- disperse to tonify

Clinically this can be viewed in the following ways:

#### *Tonification*

If you choose to tonify, you must decide how you wish to tonify in order to achieve the desired result. There are six choices of tonification to consider:

- 1) Tonifying to strengthen the qi so that it can fill and leave no room for leakage.
- 2) Tonifying to strengthen the qi so that there is greater flow to disperse a blockage.
- 3) Tonifying to gather qi and calm the body so that specific things do not happen.
- 4) Tonifying to stimulate the qi and excite the body to do something.
- 5) Tonifying the zheng qi to push out the pernicious qi.
- 6) Tonifying the zheng qi to keep the pernicious qi out.

#### *Dispersal*

If you choose to disperse, you must decide how you wish to disperse in order to achieve the desired result. Below are six choices of dispersal to consider:

- 1) Dispersing to break blocked qi so that there is greater flow.
- 2) Dispersing to create space for zheng qi to gather.
- 3) Dispersing the qi to stimulate the body to do something.
- 4) Dispersing excess qi to calm the body so that certain things stop happening.
- 5) Dispersing the pernicious qi so that the zheng qi can have room to defeat it.
- 6) Dispersing the pernicious qi to keep the zheng qi from losing its place.

#### **Treatment strategies**

Below I list the point locations and indications from Gao's poem together with the strategies of tonification and dispersal I personally use to achieve clinical results. This includes a vital step in the process of treatment - the correct sequence in which to tonify or disperse, and whether to focus on treating the point or the channel.<sup>4</sup>

**Zusanli [ST-36] below the knee, three cun between the tendons.** 三里在膝下，三寸兩筋間

- 能通心腹脹: flows/opens/unblocks the Heart [see endnote 3] and abdominal distention:

1. Tonify the point, building qi so a sensation develops in the area of the abdomen and solar plexus;
2. Gently disperse the point so the sensation drains downwards;
3. Finish by tonifying gently so there is a warm sensation overall.

- 善治胃中寒: effectively treats cold in the Stomach:

1. Tonify the channel, creating strong sensations towards the body cavity;
2. Tonify the point to create an overall sensation of warmth;
3. Repeat as necessary (until the sensation is obviously warm to the patient);
4. Gently disperse the channel so there is movement down the body;
5. Finish by tonifying gently so there is warmth overall.

- 腸鳴並泄瀉: borborygmus and diarrhoea/loose stools:

1. Tonify the channel, creating strong sensations towards the body cavity
2. Tonify the point to create overall warmth;
3. Repeat as necessary [there is no dispersing here].

- 腿脛膝腫痠: heaviness and soreness in the leg, shin and knee:

1. Tonify to gather qi at the point;
2. Disperse the qi along the channel;
3. Finish with gentle channel tonification.

- 傷寒羸瘦損: damage from shang han attack [so serious they almost died and have been sick for a while] and damage from emaciation/starvation:

1. Extremely gentle tonifying of the point (not the channel) to slowly rebuild qi without causing too much movement.

- 氣蠱及諸般: all types of serious distention [drum-like/turtleshell-like], including parasites:

1. If there is acute excess overlaying the deficiency first disperse the channel, otherwise tonify the channel;
2. Gently disperse the channel to drain out the distention;
3. End by tonifying the point so that the distention does not return.

- 年過三旬後，針灸眼有光: after 30 years old, [this point] can be used to maintain health and vitality as seen through the shen in the eyes:

1. Moxa or gentle tonification of the point on a routine basis so that there is a sensation of warmth in the body cavity.

**Neiting [ST-44] outside the second toe, belonging to foot yangming.** 內廷次指外，本屬足陽明

- 能治四肢厥: jue ni of the four limbs [sudden qi reversal leading to cold limbs, as in shock]:

1. First gently tonify the channel - going slowly to judge how scattered the patient's qi is or how weak they are;
2. Strongly tonify the channel to return flow to the limbs;
3. Strongly tonify the point to strengthen zheng (upright) qi

- 喜靜惡聞聲: likes quiet, shuns conversation and noise:

1. Gently tonify the point to calm and anchor the shen;
2. Gently disperse the channel to create movement down the channel and create room for the shen to spread through the whole body;
3. Gentle tonify the channel to strengthen the shen as it refills the temple [the body].

- 癰癰咽喉痛: chronic sore throat:
  1. Tonify the point so the patient feels a strong presence of zheng qi;
  2. Disperse the channel to drain out the pernicious that has taken residence and that the zheng qi been unable to dislodge.
- 數欠: frequent yawning:
  1. Tonify the point so there is more power when doing step two below:
  2. Disperse the channel to break the qi stagnation affecting the connection of the Lung and Kidney qi.
- 及牙疼: toothache:
  1. If due to deficiency, tonify the point so the patient feels a strong presence of zheng qi;
  2. Disperse the channel to drain out the pernicious that has taken residence and that the zheng qi has been unable to dislodge;
  3. If the problem is due to excess, or involves excess overlying deficiency, disperse the channel to draw down the pernicious qi.
- 氣虛不能食: deficient [Spleen] qi, unable to eat:
  1. Tonify the channel to stimulate the Middle Palace's functions of transformation and transportation [so that the Stomach qi goes down and the Spleen qi goes up];

**Quchi [L.I.-11] seek with praying hands, with a bent elbow seek along the bone.** 曲池拱手取, 屈肘骨邊求

- 善治肘中痛: elbow pain [all types]: after deciding whether it is acute or chronic, excess or deficient, choose technique accordingly.
- 偏風手不收: hemiplegia, unable to close the hand:
  1. Recent/pre-atrophy: tonify and flow the channel;
  2. Atrophied/cold settled in: tonify but do not flow; gather and build qi at the point.
- 挽弓開不得: unable to use strength to pull back a bow [forearm]:
  1. Using a more distal insertion than the standard placement of Quchi L.I.-11, first disperse ashi points, then disperse to flow channel, then deeply tonify, gathering qi at the point.
- 筋緩莫梳頭: flaccid tendons, unable to comb the hair (upper arm):
  1. Tonify to flow channel;
  2. Tonify to build qi in the area of the point.
- 喉痹從欲死: throat bi with desire to die [this can be anaphylactic shock, amongst other conditions]:
  1. Strong 'disperse to disperse' technique. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to full explain this technique, it basically involves producing a needling sensation so intense that the patient feels great pain. They will sweat, writhe about and want to escape from the needle (and will thus need to be held down by others). The underlying principle is that the intense stimulation overrides the current condition of the body, stimulating it to flush out the illness.
- 發熱更無休: emitting heat, not resting during the night [heat-insomnia]:
  1. Disperse to flow out excess stagnation stuck in channel;

2. Disperse to release heat and calm the patient (who should sweat and experience a change in breathing).

- 偏身風癬癩: scabies, ringworm and skin rashes [red and heat-related more than wet and damp-related] on the body:

1. Disperse to flow out excess stagnation stuck in channel;
2. Disperse to release heat and calm the patient (who should sweat and experience a change in breathing);
3. If there is time, repeat low-intensity dispersing to continue to clear heat from the skin.

**Hegu (L.I.-4) at the mouth of the tiger, in between the bones of the two fingers.** 合谷在虎口, 兩指岐骨間

- 骨疼: bone pain (local bones):
  1. Tonify point and channel if due to cold;
  2. Disperse point and channel if due to heat.
- 並面腫: swelling of the face:
  1. Tonify the channel to create flow, so that the swelling disappears with the movement in the channel.
- 瘧病熱還寒: malaria with hot turning to cold:
  1. Tonify to fill the wei qi and thus expel the pernicious from the shaoyang layer (provoke a gentle sweat - not too intense - and try to produce a sensation of 'filling' to keep the pernicious from returning);
- 齒齲: tooth decay:
  1. If there is an acute, painful, rotting tooth: disperse to draw down channel away from mouth;
  2. In the case of chronic bad teeth:
    - with Stomach heat: disperse the channel;
    - with advanced age/weak Kidney qi: tonify up the channel to the teeth, but try not to cause sweating.
- 鼻衄血: bloody nose from heat in the blood/reckless blood:
  1. Disperse channel, first strongly and then gently.
- 口噤不開言: lockjaw unable to speak:
  1. Very strongly disperse at the point, and then disperse to drain the channel;
  2. Repeat until either the patient is able to speak or the body is visibly relaxed despite the strong technique. Then encourage rest.

**Weizhong [BL-40] inside the bent leg, in the middle of the crease.** 委中曲腿里, 橫紋脈中央

- 腰痛不能舉: back pain so that one cannot straighten up:
  1. Bleed according to textbook descriptions.
- 沉沉引脊梁: heavy heavy spine/backbone that is bent:
  1. Bleed if excess, otherwise tonify the channel. Ideally have the patient leaning on a table. First check the range of movement, and then needle. Then re-check the range of movement. Repeat until a change is obtained.
- 痠疼筋痠展: sore and painful tendons, unable to extend the leg:
  1. Palpate the tendons/ligaments left and right, and above and below the point for tenderness, and needle ashi points to disperse stasis.
  2. If nothing obvious is observed/palpated, tonify with

a shallow needle technique so that the patients feels qi enveloping the knee.

• 風痺發無常: wind bi happening at non-predictable intervals:

1. Tonify to stimulate entire channel and thus taiyang function to resist wind.

• 膝頭難伸屈: difficulty extending the knee:

1. Palpate the tendons/ligaments left and right, above and below the point for tenderness, and needle ashi points to disperse stasis;

2. If nothing obvious is observed/palpated, tonify with a shallow needle technique so that the patients feels qi enveloping the knee.

**Chengshan [BL-57] known as fish belly, between the two muscles of the calf** 承山名魚腹, 腓腿分肉間

• 善治腰疼痛: pain in the back [all types]:

1. Disperse to flow and resolve the tightness of the channel.

• 痔疾大便難: haemorrhoids and difficulty defecating:

1. Disperse to relax the sinew channel (hunt for ashi points in the area);

2. Disperse to flow the channel.

• 腳氣並膝腫: Leg qi [see endnote 5] and knee swelling:

1. Treat ashi points in the area and then tonify the channel.

• 輾轉戰疼: pain / soreness / trembling upon extending the leg or turning the foot:

1. Needle ashi points;

2. Disperse channel to disperse stasis;

3. Finish by gently tonifying to encourage qi to return to area.

• 霍亂及轉筋: cholera and cramping so severe as to cause muscle knots:

1. Gently but deeply tonify the point to return qi to the area;

2. Exercise caution with ashi work as cramps of this nature can cause excruciating pain to the patient. Needling is difficult due to the discomfort of the patient and the intensity of the cramps themselves can easily bend or break the needle.

**Taichong [LIV-3] at the big toe, needle two cun behind the joint.** 太沖足大指, 節後二寸中

• 能醫驚癇風: fright, seizures, epilepsy-type convulsions:

1. Disperse channel during manic phase;

2. Tonify point by needling through to connect to Yongquan [KID-1].

• 咽喉並心脹: swelling of the throat, oesophagus and Heart [-centre]:

1. Disperse down channel to drain excess.

• 兩足不能動: inability to move both feet:

1. Tonify up channel (bilateral treatment is often necessary) to release stagnation of qi.

• 七疝偏墜腫: seven types of shan disorder with dropping and heaviness on one side:

1. Tonify to expand qi up channel past abdomen (consider needling with the legs spread apart to better strengthen the

channel and thus affect the shan disorder).

• 眼目似雲蒙: as if cloudiness and blurriness obscures the eyes:

1. Tonify point by needling through to connect to Yongquan [KID-1].

• 亦能療腰痛: unspecified back pain [all types]:

1. Tonify or disperse the channel accordingly.

**Kunlun [BL-60], on the outside of the ankle, seek above the edge of the heel.** 崑崙足外踝, 跟骨上邊尋

• 轉筋腰尻痛: lumbosacral pain [excess-type injury, usually after a fall]:

1. Usually disperse after obtaining strong deqi sensation.

• 暴喘滿冲心: sudden shortness of breath, sensation of fullness and rushing to the heart:

1. [N.B. this may be a heart attack] usually disperse after obtaining strong deqi sensation.

• 舉步行不得: can raise the leg but unable to walk [acute heel pain]:

1. Usually disperse after obtaining strong deqi sensation.

• 一動即呻吟: moaning and groaning upon movement [heel pain]:

1. Usually disperse after obtaining strong deqi sensation.

**Huantiao [GB-30], at the pivot of the femur, seek by lying on the side with bent leg.** 環跳在髀樞, 側臥屈足取

• 腰折莫能顧: bent over, unable to turn the head [literally 'back broken' in Chinese]:

1. Needle ashi points.

• 冷風並濕痺: cold, wind and damp bi:

1. Tonify the point to flow the channel.

• 腿膀連端痛: leg and hip pain connecting to the calf [sciatica]:

1. Needle ashi points;

2. Tonify the point to flow the channel.

• 轉則重嗟呼: turning to the sides evokes sighs of grief and regret:

1. Needle ashi points;

2. Tonify the point to flow the channel.

**Yanglingquan [GB-34], belongs below the knee, needle outside the calf by one cun.** 陽陵歸膝下, 外廉一寸中

• 膝重並麻木: heaviness in the knee and numbness and tingling:

1. Tonify the point to flow the channel.

• 冷痺及偏風: cold bi and hemiplegia:

1. Tonify the point to expand the qi;

2. Tonify the point to flow the channel;

3. Repeat points one and two gently several times, with greater emphasis on the expanding qi technique.

• 舉足不能起: able to lift the leg but unable to get up:

1. Tonify point to expand the qi;

2. Tonify to flow the channel;

3. Or consider ashi needling if there are obvious points of pain upon palpation.

- 坐臥似衰翁: sitting down or lying down like a depleted old man:

1. Tonify point to expand qi;
2. Tonify to flow the channel (also consider needling along the channel if Huantiao GB-30 alone does not produce enough flow along the channel).

**Tongli [HE-5], behind the wrist, at the spot 1.5 cun proximal.** 通里腕骨後，一寸五分中

- 欲言聲不出: desire to speak but no sound comes out [deficiency causing excess]:

1. Focus on tonifying the point, with occasional dispersing.

- 懊懣及怔忡: vexed irritation and depression:

2. Tonify more than than disperse the point (although both have to be done).

- 實則四肢重，頭腮面頰紅: excess leading to heaviness in the four limbs with head, cheek and cheekbones red in colour:

1. [N.B.: this may be a heart attack] disperse, with occasional tonification, focusing on creating a strong sensation in the hand.

- 虛則不能食，暴暗面無容: Deficiency leading to inability to eat, sudden muteness with a colourless face:

1. [N.B.: this may be a heart attack] tonify with occasional dispersing, causing deep and regular breathing.

**Lieque (LU-7), above the side of the wrist, at the cross of the index finger.** 列缺腕側上，次指手交叉

- 善療偏頭患: one-sided headaches [not necessarily full blown migraines – may involve a pinched nerve in the neck or one-sided muscle tension]:

1. If the headache is acute disperse the channel;
2. If the headache is mild tonify to cause greater blood-flow in the area.

- 遍身風痺麻: Wind bi numbness throughout the body:

1. Tonify the point with perpendicular needling what does to expand the qi (and thus the breath).

- 痰涎頻壅口: phlegm and spittle (drool) leaking through a closed mouth:

1. Tonify the channel.

- 口噤不開牙: lockjaw:

1. Disperse the channel.

## Conclusion

The author hopes that the information here will prove useful to practitioners, and that they can use it to re-examine the way they use the Heavenly Star Points of Ma Danyang in clinical practice ■

**Andrew Nugent-Head** has lived in China since the age of 18. He left the United States in 1986 to study Chinese Medicine, martial arts and internal cultivation. He formally began studying Chinese medicine in 1989 in mentor-disciple relationships and entered into the Yin Style Bagua tradition in 1993 under the late Dr. Xie Peiqi. He is the founder of the Association for Traditional Studies (ATS – see [www.traditionalstudies.org](http://www.traditionalstudies.org)), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving China's traditional knowledge. When not travelling internationally to teach, Andrew is the chief practitioner of the ATS clinic in a small village within the tea hills of Hangzhou.

## References

- 1 Deadman, P. Al-Khafaji, M, & Baker, K. (1998). *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications: Hove
- 2 A common appellation among the old doctors with which the author has studied.
- 3 Although the Chinese poem is written in five-character metre, it is not 'poetic' as such. It uses five character phrases to list the location and functions of the point and quips on the efficacy of the point.
- 4 'Centre' or 'heart' is the literal translation of the character used - referring to the epigastric region.
- 5 This implies a feeling that the upper body (i.e. spine) feels too heavy to hold upright.
- 6 Weakness of the lower limbs due to beriberi.
- 7 Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this article to cover this distinction of treating the channel versus treating the point. Readers are directed to the seminar on Tangible Qi at <<http://www.traditionalstudies.org/education/54-free-online-videos-education/free-online-videos/98-tangible-qi-lecture>>
- 8 See the Tangible Qi seminars referenced in endnote 6.
- 9 Zhengchong is the fear, palpitations and listlessness associated with depression.