Introduction

The images presented here are taken from the *Emei shan tiangang zhixue fa* (Mt Emei’s Big Dipper1 Finger-point Method) by Zhou Qianchuan 周潜川 (1905–71), from Sichuan province. Zhou was a renowned physician operating in an arcane and mystical tradition.2 The book describes 28 different hand positions for manipulating Qi气 in others. However the book has had a troubled history and does not exist in its complete original form. Though first published in 1962, the original text with any accompanying images was destroyed. The book’s author, Zhou Qianchuan, came to be regarded as a miscreant for his work in regard to Qigong and religious medicine, subjects that came to be regarded as mixin迷信 (outlawed superstition). This chapter offers a window on to the 20th-century history of a secret medico-religious tradition through the biography of a major protagonist and the reconstruction of one of his key works by his disciples and others who were close to him.

My Family Involvement

More than 50 years ago, I used to accompany my father to Zhou’s house in Beijing where my father had become one of Zhou’s students. I would then see my father, a marine engineer by profession, go home and make drawings of the techniques Zhou had taught him (Fig. 2).

My father and his family had a longstanding interest in Chinese medicine and herbal medicine in particular. My great-uncle had received a secret transmission of analgesic herbs from a doctor who posed for a while as a vagrant, in order to establish my great-uncle’s suitability to receive the recipe. When my father had fallen ill in 1957, he had cured himself with herbal medicine. Then Zhou arrived out of the blue from Shanghai and my father was introduced to him. My father would study with Zhou several times a week and when in the early 60s Zhou was invited to Shanxi to work, he specified that any remaining patients in Beijing should be referred to my father. After a while my father gave up his job in Beijing to follow Zhou to Shanxi. However their relationship was brought to a stop by the political movements of the mid-60s and thereafter my father had to return to Beijing. Zhou was persecuted and imprisoned. After a period of unemployment, my father had some great good fortune in the form of a backdated pension allowance. It was the fulfilment of a prediction that Zhou had had made that my father would enjoy a financial windfall in his early forties. Zhou himself had no such good fortune and died for want of adequate medical treatment while still in prison in 1971.

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1 Emei mountain is a famous Daoist temple site in Sichuan, while ‘Tiangang’ is the constellation Ursa Major, also know as the Big Dipper, an object of veneration in Daoist ritual.
2 In an earlier publication, in 2001, I erroneously gave the year of Zhou Qianchuan’s death as 1962. Here I have corrected this in line with Zhou Huaijiang’s 1985 article. Zhou Huaijiang is Zhou Qianchuan’s grandson.
Zhou Qianchuan’s Career and History of his Book

Zhou Qianchuan was from Sichuan Province. He began his career as an army medical orderly. Subsequently, with financial support from his well-to-do father-in-law, he was able first to attend Wuhan University, and then to travel to Great Britain to further his studies in military engineering. After suffering an injury while practising martial arts, he was successfully treated using Mongol medicine. This aroused his interest in Chinese medicine in general. He went to the Emei and Wudang mountains, where he studied a wide range of subjects from many different traditions, including divination and the martial arts. However his core interest was in Chinese medical theories and techniques. His research in this field enabled him to develop his own unique form of practice.

After the civil war Zhou began to practise medicine in Shanghai. Then in the 1950s he was invited to treat patients in Beijing by some of the celebrated figures there. Thanks to his exceptional therapeutic results, he received a recommendation to the central government, and a vice minister in the Ministry of Health arranged for him to move from Shanghai and practise at Beijing’s Sanshi xuehui 三時學會 (The Three Era Study Association), an influential lay Buddhist research centre in Beijing. In the evenings he gave lectures on medicine, which my father would attend. In those days Zhou’s treatments cost five yuan; equivalent to a month’s salary. From that we can tell that he enjoyed considerable status and respect. In the early 1960s, he was invited to work at the Shanxi TCM Research Institution after successfully treating some officials from that province. Zhou accepted the offer on condition that he would be able to continue to research, teach and publish on Chinese medicine and neidan 内丹 alchemy, a form of inner meditation aimed at refining the elixirs of life (See Despeux, Chapter 2 in this volume, pp. 63–4). In Shanxi, Zhou regularly treated members of the political and military elites. He published a number of books during this time, including the Qigong yao’er liaoфа 氣功藥餌療法 (Qigong Tonics and Remedies) and the Emei shi’er zhuang shimi 峨眉十二莊誦密 (Secret Explanation of the Emei Shi’er Zhuang), and he also gave a series of unpublished lectures which his students would record and circulate amongst themselves.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zhou’s case was reassessed and he was exonerated. Interest in both Qigong and Daoist medicine then started to grow again, as it had in the 1950s. With the appetite for information about such techniques reaching a nationwide fever pitch, it was the survival of the unpublished lectures collected by his students that made the re-publication of the text possible. However some of the original images were missing and had instead been to be replaced by brief descriptions.

It is by comparing the illustrations in my possession that were made by father in the 1960s with the ones re-published in 1985 that I can verify the accuracy of the latter.

Analysis of the Text

Mt Emei’s Big Dipper Finger-Point Method List of 28 Hand Positions

- Hezui jin 鶴咀勁 (The Crane’s Beak)
- Fengchaitou jin 風豺頭 (The Phoenix and Hairpin)
- Yingzui jin 鷹嘴勁 (The Eagle’s Beak)
- Shetou jin 蛇頭勁 (The Snake’s Head)
- Yazui jin 鴨嘴勁 (The Duck’s Beak)
- Riyue kou jin 日月扣勁 (Fastening Sun and Moon)
- Chongtian chu jin 沖天杵勁 (Soaring Pestle)
- Yizhi chan jin 一指禪勁 (Single Finger Meditation)
- Jingou jin 銅勾勁 (Golden Hook)
- Wuding kai shan jin 五丁開山勁 (Five Fingertips Open the Mountain)
- Huzhao jin 虎爪勁 (Tiger Claw)
- Long tan zhu jin 龍探爪勁 (The Dragon’s Claw)
- Dingtou jin 丁頭勁 (Head of Strong Man)
- Yingzhua jin 鷹爪勁 (The Eagle’s Claw)
- Long xian zhu jin 龍衔珠勁 (Dragon with Pearl in its Mouth)
- Fengzhui jin 风指勁 (Even Fingers)
- Fuyu fan yun jin 飛雨翻雲勁 (Recurrent Rain and Rolling Clouds)
- Tongtian jin 通天勁 (To Reach the Sky)
- Liangtianchi jin 量天尺勁 (Ruler to Measure the sky)
- Jian juekai qin jin 斬決開氣勁 (Sword to Open Qi)
- Lijing jin 離經勁 (Separating the Channels)
- Luoyuan jin 鹿苑勁 (Wild Goose Landing)
- Pengshajin 拳沙勁 (Cupping Sand)
- Taiji mo yun jin 太極摩雲勁 (Taiji Rubbing Clouds)
- Shaoyang zuqi jin 少陽祖氣勁 (Shaoyang Ancestral Qi)

Editor’s note: on Qigong fever (氣功熱) see D.A. Palmer, Qigong Fever, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.
Each hand position has some descriptive verses dedicated to it, followed by a further explanation. The verses are somewhat antique in style and content. They include both the traditional master/disciple teaching that Zhou received and his own, subsequently developed, personal understanding and interpretation of the subject matter. The first verse on each gesture usually describes the shape and the action of the hand. For example, the first verse of the ‘Hezui jin’ 鶴咀勁 (The Crane’s Beak) reads:

The Crane’s beak swallows snakes and pecks fish. When it pecks the pine tree, its neck is agile and its wings are open. When doing this, the movement of the wings and the beak are coordinated. Repeat it, using the eight methods.\[Bafa 八法 – see item 3 below.\]

The main points of the author’s explanation are summarised below.

1. The five fingers form the beak and wings of the crane while the wrist forms the neck.

2. The ‘beak’ can be opened (to swallow a snake) or closed (to peck fish). The strength of the ‘peck’ can be adjusted by opening or closing the ‘wings’.

3. The \textit{ba fa} 八法 (Eight methods) are: \textit{han} 含 (keep in the mouth), \textit{tun} 吞 (swallow), \textit{tu} 吐 (spit), \textit{rou} 揉 (rub/knead), \textit{pi} 劈 (split/crack open), \textit{tan} 弹 (flick), \textit{zhen} 震 (shake/vibrate), \textit{tui} 推 (push). These are all essentially simple massage techniques, related to the type of hand movement involved.

The two or three verses that follow are mostly about the clinical usage of the technique, including the treatment of common diseases, how to use them to treat problems arising from Qigong practice and their use in the diagnosis of disease. The last verse for each technique is about its use in martial arts. For example, the last verse of \textit{Chongtian chu jin} 冲天杵劲 (The Soaring Pestle) goes as follows:

In \textit{Chongtian chu jin}, the Qi rushes up to the heavens. It is only taught to girls for self defence against attackers. If a master teaches its use on the sixue 死穴 (death point), the result will be fatal. This must not be taken lightly.

\textbf{Chongtian Chu Jin} (Soaring Pestle) (Fig. 4)

This belongs to the field of advanced martial arts, known as \textit{yi jing zhi dong} 以靜制動 (stillness overcoming movement). An adept looks to strike his opponent’s death points thus putting an end to matters. Similarly the last verse in \textit{yizhi chan jin} 一指禪勁 (Single Finger Meditation) describes how you use the technique to locate the LR-14 Liver 14 qimen acupoint on an assailant’s chest beneath the nipple. Striking there will lead to the other party vomiting blood with death following within seven days. Unsurprisingly it is regarded as extremely dangerous and the use of this technique is strictly proscribed under the code of Wude 武德 (martial arts ethics). The problematic question of death points I will come back to in my discussion below.

Zhou Qianchuan describes the techniques in four aspects: properties, provenance, purpose and pre-requisites.

\textbf{Properties}

In an author’s preface, dated 15 July, 1962, it says that Mt Emei’s Big Dipper Finger-point Method is the \textit{daoyin dianxue shu} 导引穴穴术 (leading and guiding therapeutic exercise, acupoint technique) of the Emei yangsheng xuepai 峨嵋養生學派 (Mt Emei School of Nurturing Life).\footnote{For yangsheng in the 20th century, see Dear 2013.} This \textit{daoyin dianxue shu} has two types of technique: \textit{neijing} 内景 and \textit{waijing} 外景 (inward and outward looking). The hand gestures we have listed all belong to the \textit{waijing} 外景 (outer \textit{daoyin} technique). In previous generations these techniques were highly secret, only transmitted orally from master to disciple and memorised by heart.

The \textit{neijing} techniques are differentiated from the \textit{waijing} in the book’s first chapter with the following passage:

\footnote{Literally ‘crane chews the force’.}
Regulate your breath by *tuna fa* 吐納法 (breathe in and out with one’s mind). Focus your conscious by *guanxiang fa* 觀想法 (observation and meditation) in order to rectify imbalances of Yin and Yang, Qi and blood. Refine *jin* 津 (liquid) into *jing* 精 (essence), and then refine *jing* 精 into Qi 氣, then refine Qi 氣 into *shen* 神 (spirit), finally refine *shen* 虛 back into *xu* 虛 (emptiness).

Both *neijing* and *waijing* were used to regulate Yin, Yang, Qi, and blood through out the body. Using the techniques while expressing one’s *neigong* 內功真氣 (internal arts for true Qi)⁸ to stimulate the channel and acupoints on the exterior of a patient was to be in accordance with the systematisation of traditional diagnosis that was developing in the 1950s movement to modernise and standardise Chinese medicine, *bianzheng lunzhi* 辨證論治 (condition-based diagnosis and treatment determination).⁹ This unique synthesis was classified as *waijing daoyin anqiao shu* 外景導引按蹺術 (outer *daoyin* and massage technique).

**Provenance**

The history of these techniques is described in the first chapter of *Mt Emei’s Big Dipper Finger-point Method*. It is claimed they date back to the latter part of the Southern Song Dynasty (13th century CE) and were created by Baiyun Chanshi 白雲禪師 (White Cloud Zen Master), a monk living on Emei Mountain. According to the legend, he combined the theories of Buddhism, Daoism, and related elements of popular practices. His work covered a series of methods including *liangong* 練功 (martial arts and other esoteric body training), *danyao* 丹藥 (alchemical pills and medicine), *daoyin* (‘leading and guiding’ therapeutic exercise) and *anqiao* 按蹺 (massage). Techniques attributed to him, the *Emei shi’er zhuang* 峨眉十二莊 (The Twelve Statements of Emei) include *donggong* 動功 (movement exercises), *sancheng gongfa* 三乘功法 (the three levels exercise method), *jingong* 靜功 (exercises without movement), and *xuannen daxiao danyao* 玄門大小丹藥 (Dark Gate large and small elixirs), as well as *Mt Emei’s Big Dipper Finger-point Method*.

The *Twelve Statements of Mt Emei* throws considerable light on the source of the Big Dipper Finger-point Method. A number of the latter’s hand positions can be found directly described in the former, albeit sometimes with different names. These include *Hezuojin*, *Tuotian jiedi jin*, *Chongtian chu jin*, *Wuding kaishan jin*, and *Huzhao jin*. However all the published evidence available in China today points to Zhou himself being the pre- eminent transcriber, perhaps even re-inventor of this *Emei shi’er zhuang* tradition.¹⁰

**Purpose and Pre-Requisites**

The purpose of *Emei tiangang zhiexue* gestures can be summarised as follows:
- to correct Qigong *piancha* 氣功偏差 (Qigong deviation)¹¹ – in this case, problems arising from errors in practice;
- to treat disease generally;
- to aid diagnosis, assessing the Qi and blood in a channel while taking the pulse.

The requirements to be able to practise the *Emei tiangang zhiexue* are described as:
- a basic knowledge of *TCM* theory, channels and acupoints;
- the practitioner must regularly practise both *donggong* and *jingong* (see above). This will allow the emission of *shenqi* towards the patient, creating a genuine *neigong* treatment instead of simple body contact.

**Discussion**

All the above, and particularly the biography of Zhou Qianchuan, raises many further questions about the different domains of medico-religious and martial arts techniques. In his story we see how, during the 20th century, overlapping religious and medical traditions were variously subject to cross-cultural and international knowledge transfer, state intervention, and both the opening up and censure of the esoteric traditions. Rapid change in the nature of acceptable knowledge, and in the structure and role of education, had serious consequences for the survival of the individuals involved and the traditions alike. And, specific to the aims of this volume, we have examined the history of illustration in the survival of *Mt Emei’s Big Dipper Finger-point Method*.

For example, what is the significance of ‘death points’ and how do they relate to dianxue 點穴, or acupoint

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⁸ *Neigong* 內功 refers to martial arts exercises which benefit the inner organs. *Zhenqi* 真氣 refers to ‘true Qi, one’s inborn vitality’.
⁹ For a discussion of *bianzheng lunzhi* see Scheid 2002, pp. 200–4.
¹⁰ Online searches reveal five books relating to the *Emei shi’er zhuang* tradition. In each case, the prefaces would seem to indicate Zhou Qianchuan as the origin of the material.
¹¹ ‘Qigong Deviation’ has become a politically loaded term in the post-1949 era, but there is widespread recognition both in current and historical sources that Qigong practised without proper safeguards can put the practitioner at serious risk. It can be equated with the psychological syndrome identified in classical texts as *zouhuo rumo* 走火入魔 – possession by an evil spirit. For a historical discussion of the subject, see Eskildsen 2008, pp. 259–91.
pressing techniques? How do they relate to medicine? Yi-Li Wu has recently published on the shared technologies of ‘apertures’ of the body in the realms of acupuncture, bones, and mortal spots – to discuss points on the body that were more or less vulnerable to injury.\(^\text{12}\) Roman Sieler has explored vital spots in the martial and medical arts of Kalari in Tamil Nadu.\(^\text{13}\) It is clear that besides position and timing, enormous force makes the difference between therapeutic and lethal applications.\(^\text{14}\) From his recorded sayings and his own writing, we can tell that Zhou Qianchuan accepted the existence of the death point technique. However as a medical doctor, whether for an ambivalence born of his cross-cultural training, or a doubt that his more esoteric views about the body might not prove acceptable, he generally avoided the subject. Perhaps the technique only existed in legend since, in the run of everyday life, one does not have much opportunity to apply it. In a military context practitioners might easily think failure to apply the death points was a consequence of an inadequate level of ability. In the same way, while there is no reliable evidence for yogic flying, the highest level of practice supposedly attainable in that art, this does not prevent many yoga practitioners from believing that it is still an achievable goal. If, on the other hand, the death point technique has some efficacy, it can only be as a feature of the grander claims for the Asian martial arts, which would see the ability to cause internal damage at places which would otherwise seem biologically invulnerable as an aspect of the supra-normal practice of Qigong. Such skills maintain their power and prestige, especially in specialist and secret training. One can point to the Qigong practices demonstrated by the Security Forces, where policemen famously break cobble stones with their bare hands. The techniques are still kept secret and nothing is published about them in the mass media. Audiences may applaud related performances at the New Year festival, but no one really takes it seriously here. So I will simply make a few internalist observations about the use of these techniques to correct the problems brought about by ‘errors’ in practising Qigong.

It is well known that xingqi 行氣 and daoyin 療愈 therapeutically breathing and exercises have 2 millennia of history in China. If we include Fojiao zuochan 佛教坐禪 and Mizong xiadian 密宗修煉 (Buddhist meditational training) then the potential for zouhuo runo 走火入魔 (lit. passing in to the fire and entering demonic possession – nowadays thought of as obsession brought about by mispractice) through inappropriate practice was huge. Zhang Lu 張瑞 (1617–99) wrote a book entitled Zhang shi yitong – runo zouhuo 張氏醫通・入魔走火 (Dr Zhang’s Observations of Passing into the Fire and Entering Demonic Possession, i.e. mistakes in Qi practice). It records cases not otherwise mentioned by doctors, such as those where monks or practitioners experienced problems (zouhuo runo) during Qi practice, and ancient texts offered no solutions. Apparently they had no option but to rely on stock remedies such as Tianwang buxin dan 天王補心丹 (The Heavenly King’s Supplementing the Heart pills) or Liuwei dihuang wan 六味地黃丸 (Six Flavour dihuang pills) to treat themselves.

From 1950s onwards China set up three Qigong institutions. Under their aegis, many Qigong therapists were trained and Qigong practice became widely disseminated. However after the founding of the Tangshan Institute, the Shanghai Institute was set up in 1957 with part of its remit specifically to deal with Qigong qiancha 氣功偏差 (Qigong deviation). Since the techniques studied revolved around the jingong and donggong exercises taken from ancient texts, their approach to correcting errors in practice was simply to try to explain to the practitioner his or her mistakes, while in extreme cases referral to mental health experts was required.\(^\text{15}\) This marks a significant contrast with Zhou’s method of using massage and daoyin to treat Qigong deviation.

Unfortunately for us the photographs of Zhou treating qiancha patients were lost in the Cultural Revolution. But why were Zhou’s methods not more widely adopted by his

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\(^\text{12}\) Wu Yi-Li 2015, pp. 64–6.

\(^\text{13}\) Sieler 2012.

\(^\text{14}\) In Celestial Lancets, Lu Gwei-Djen and Joseph Needham refer to the example of the Indian mahout or elephant handler. The mahouts are supposed to use a similar death point technique, which could be taken as evidence that such points exist in all animals. But Needham is unable to tell us how the mahouts apply such techniques, or whether they have or require any relationship with Qigong or similar exercises. Lu and Needham [1983] 2002, pp. 69, 316–17.

\(^\text{15}\) Ma Jiren 1983, p. 267.
friends and followers in the field? The answer is simply because in this area the practice of every individual is different, and requires specialist attention. Zhou himself practised two types of daoyin; namely the big and small daoyin (da daoyin 大導引 and xiao daoyin 小導引). Da daoyin is a very particular exercise. The practitioner needs both a deep inner power and to be very familiar with the neijing jingluo 內景經絡 (inner channel) syndrome differentiation principles in order to practise successfully.

Thus even though we still have Zhou’s theories, it is not possible to recreate the particularity of his abilities and practice. In such a system every practitioner is the unique engine of his or her own development. Furthermore Wang Songling 王松齡, in his research into Qigong history, has said that although the major schools, like Wudang or Emei, can be broadly traced back over hundreds or thousands of years, the nature of their traditional system of oral transmission makes detailed study almost impossible. However my personal experience of Zhou Qianchuan has given me at least some small insight into his methods.

Conclusion

In the course of this story we have seen the Qi traditions of exercise, massage, acupuncture and the martial arts survive and transition from secret arts allied to divination and ritual practice into school and university education. This now is a domain that, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, remains wary of superstition and religion and is keen to align itself with the authority of the new Revolution, remains wary of superstition and religion and is keen to align itself with the authority of the new

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16 For example, Liu Guizhen, who established the first Qigong practice institute (in Tangshan city) in 1951, was expelled from the CCP, forced to resign as President of the Institute and sent to the countryside for re-education as a result of the case against Zhou Qianchuan in 1955. Liu was made to suffer further cruel treatment during the Cultural Revolution. See Wang Songling 1989, pp. 344–55.

17 In xiao daoyin the commonly seen problems are a heavy sensa-

18 Wang Songling 1989, p. 3.