

## Medical Qigong: A Vital Branch of Oriental Medicine

by Jampa Mackenzie Stewart, Dipl. Ac. (NCCAOM), M.S.O.M., Lic. Ac.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Early Qigong History

Like the Dineh or Navajo people of the southwestern United States, the ancient Chinese saw disease and natural disasters as signs that an individual or a tribe of people had fallen out of harmony with Nature. The cure for the Navajo was to reestablish a correct relationship with Nature, with society, and within the individual through ceremony, including sand paintings, chants, prayers and dances.



*Navajo Healing Ceremony*

To achieve a similar healing goal, the legendary Daoist emperor Yü the Great, of the early Xia dynasty (2,000 - 1,600 B.C.), ecstatically danced the movements of a bear to harmonize heaven and earth and to stop the floods and pestilence in his kingdom. His shamanic dance, known as "The Pace of Yü," is still practiced by Daoists today.

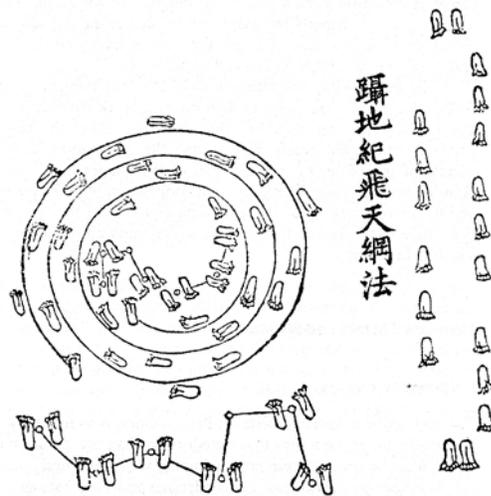


Diagram of steps used in *The Pace of Yu*

The earliest Chinese doctors were shamans. The Chinese character for doctor, *yi*, depicts a feathered shaman doing an ecstatic dance and holding a quiver full of arrows. The arrows, presumably, represented spiritual power, or righteous Qi, to drive off evil influences; later this concept was extended to the use of acupuncture needles.<sup>1</sup> The shamans were women as well as men. They would go into ecstatic trance, and would often journey to the spirit world or channel divinities to diagnose the cause of the problem; they would then pray and dance to treat the disease

Like the Native Americans, the early Daoist shaman/healers saw that by connecting to the natural powers through dance and movement they could restore outer harmony and balance with the forces of nature. It was not long before they transferred this same reasoning to the microcosm of their own bodies. Therefore, of the earliest know Qigong healing forms, many were derived from the movements of animals. The *Qi Gong Classic (Dao Yin Tu)*, discovered in the tomb of King Ma in 1973 and dating back to the second century B.C., illustrates in manuscripts written on silk

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of the arrows representing spiritual power was first postulated by Kenneth S. Cohen, drawn from his studies of contemporary and historical shamanic healers from several traditions around the world. These shamans saw themselves as shooting arrows of spiritual power into their patients to restore righteous energy and drive off the evil influences causing disease. This differs from the views of Joseph Needham, in *Celestial Lancets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), who saw the arrows as representing acupuncture needles. Based upon the shamanic character of medicine in those early days in China, Cohen's interpretation seems more plausible.

over 45 Qigong postures with descriptions of the movements as well as the names of the diseases which they treat; over half of these postures are animal movements.<sup>2</sup>



*Illustration of Medical Qigong postures from the Mawangdui Daoyin Classics*

One of the ministers of Huang Di (2697-2598BC), the Yellow Emperor and patriarch of Chinese medicine, was the shaman Zhu You, who advocated exorcistic prayer over the use of needles and herbs to treat illness.<sup>3</sup> According to Kenneth Cohen, an American Qigong master and author, "Some scholars believe that Zhu You practiced External Qi Healing at the same time that he prayed for patients. This is remarkably similar to the synergism of non-contact healing and prayer in Native American and other indigenous healing traditions. The Yellow Emperor's Classic states that in ancient times most illnesses were treated according to the methods of Zhu You....Professional 'prayer healers' (*zhu*) were once widespread in China. They may have formed a specialized branch of shamanism."

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<sup>2</sup> China Sports Magazine. *The Wonders of Qigong*, (Los Angeles: Wayfarer Publications), 1985, pp. 11-16

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth S. Cohen. *The Way of Qigong* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), p. 245



*Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor (2697 BC to 2598 BC.)*

Another of the Yellow Emperor's ministers was Qi Bo, one of the doctors to whom Huang Di posed his various medical questions, and whose famous dialogues were recorded as the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine). Qi Bo embodied, for his time, a radical and modernistic theory of health and illness: that disease was not so much a matter of spirits, ancestors, karma, disharmony with the gods, with nature or with society, but was more a matter of External Factors (heat, cold, wind, damp, fire, and dryness), Internal Factors (the seven pathological emotions of excess anger, joy, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear and shock<sup>4</sup>), and Neither External nor Internal Factors (overwork, excess sex, improper diet, environmental toxins). Over time, this medical philosophy, appealing to the intellectual Confucian scholars and literati within the imperial court, and represented in the views of Qi Bo, won out over the intuitive shamanistic and spiritual views of Zhu You.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Zhu You's approach never disappeared; instead it co-existed as a parallel medical approach to the "scholar's medicine", and has been widely practiced, primarily

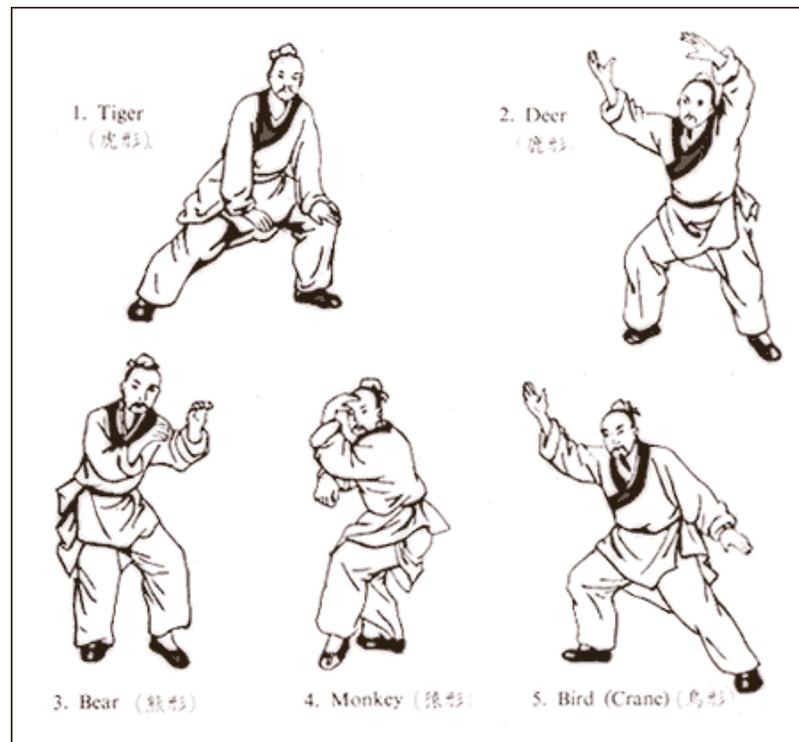
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<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Maciocia. *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine* (New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1989), p. 130

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Nine Songs* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1973), pp. 11-12

by Daoist and Buddhist priests, village healers and martial arts masters up to the present day.

Many well known Chinese doctors incorporated both philosophies of medicine into their practice. For example, Hua Tuo (110-207A.D.), the renowned Daoist physician, told his disciple Wu Pu, "The body should be exercised, but not to excess. Exercise improves digestion and keeps the meridians clear of obstructions. In this way, the body will remain free of illness. A door hinge does not rust if it is frequently used. Therefore the ancient sages practiced Daoyin....I have created a Daoyin method called the *Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Frolics)*. It can eliminate sickness and strengthen the root."<sup>6</sup> Hua Tuo devised this series of now famous Qigong exercises for his patients based upon the movements of the crane, bear, monkey, deer and tiger. These animal "dances" or Qigong exercises served to harmonize the flow of Qi within the inner universe of his patients. Each set of animal exercises relates to the principle of the Five Elements and works to strengthen, balance and harmonize the associated internal organs.



*Qigong postures from Daoist physician Hua Tuo's famous Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Frolics)*

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<sup>6</sup> Hou Han Shu, *History of the Later Han Dynasty*. trans. by Kenneth J. DeWoskin in *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

Over the past two millennia, many other doctors, martial artists, monks and priests have contributed to the body of exercises now known as Medical Qigong or Qigong Healing. There are over 3,600 different known Qigong systems in practice today!<sup>7</sup>

### **Categories of Medical Qigong**

Medical Qigong can be easily subdivided into three well recognized and widely accepted modalities used in current medical practice, both Eastern and Western:

1. Physical therapy for fitness, health maintenance, and the treatment of specific disorders;
2. Stress management exercises and relaxation techniques; and,
3. External Qi Healing (sometimes called Chinese Therapeutic Touch).<sup>8</sup>

### **QIGONG FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY**

The Qigong systems used for physical therapy are the most widely known and recognized Qigong exercises. The importance of prescribing these exercises cannot be underestimated in practice.

### **Couch Potato Diseases**

First of all, many conditions which Oriental medical practitioners encounter daily in their clinics are the result of lack of exercise. This fact is well recognized in Western medicine. If the root cause of a patient's complaint is lack of exercise, structural imbalance, or muscular weakness in a specific area, remedial treatments such as acupuncture, moxibustion or herbs alone will be inadequate for curing the problem.

Diseases of stagnation such as heart attack (heart blood stagnation), cancer (blood stagnation) and stroke (internal wind combined with blood and phlegm stagnation) are the primary causes of death in America. Their prevention and treatment are brought about by moving therapies. Yes, herbs and acupuncture can move Qi, blood and phlegm, but at the root, these problems are often exacerbated by a sedentary lifestyle, and a responsible Oriental medical practitioner must also address this element by prescribing physical therapy and exercise as part of his or her overall treatment strategy.

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<sup>7</sup> As reported by the World Academic Society of Medical Qigong, June 2007, courtesy of Dr. Bernard Shannon, one of its board member, in a private conversation with the author.

<sup>8</sup> The term "Chinese Therapeutic Touch" was first used by Ken Cohen, with the aim of presenting External Qi Healing within a framework of understanding less foreign to Western medicine.

## **Don't Let Your Health Exercise Hospitalize You!**

Secondly, for the patient who is "not sick", Qigong exercise can be recommended as a low impact aerobic exercise, similar to walking, for health maintenance and fitness. Many Westerners have enthusiastically taken up jogging, racquetball, skiing, tennis, and other exercises and sports for health, only to wind up in the emergency room or doctor's office to treat their sports injuries! Does this make sense? Should a person's exercise, which they took up for health, end up making their health worse? What's wrong with this picture?

Consider the case of the author and famous long distance runner, Jim Fixx. His excessive running caused an imbalance which resulted in his premature death from a heart attack. His coroner's report stated that his arteries were "as clean as a whistle". That fact was probably of minimal comfort to his bereaved family! From a Qigong perspective, the excessive perspiration and heat caused by his exercise, combined with the overwork of his heart, probably caused an extreme case of Heart Yin Deficiency with Empty Fire Blazing and Fluid Deficiency. His exercise was far too Yang, and he ended up needlessly consuming his Yin. This resulted in loss of life for an individual who was totally devoted to physical fitness, a tragic irony to say the least.

Qigong exercise, by contrast, is usually gentle, slow, and encourages deep breathing, stretching, and movements that are beneficial and healing to the joints, organs and bones. I believe that Qigong is superior to most Western forms of exercise because it is less likely to cause injury, and because it is aimed not only at strengthening the muscles and the cardio-vascular system, but also specifically focuses on balancing the systems of the body, building, circulating and conserving Qi, strengthening the bones, tendons, joints, nervous system, internal organs, glands, and the reproductive system as well.



*Qigong teacher Jampa Stewart in Crane Walking posture from Five Animal Frolics*

### **Yes, old dogs *can* learn new tricks**

Recent Western clinical studies have verified the effectiveness of Tai Chi Chuan in reducing falls and improving balance in the elderly.<sup>9</sup> I applaud this recognition. However, after having taught Tai Chi at senior citizen centers myself for many years, I feel that other Qigong exercises may be even more effective. For one thing, Tai Chi is a fairly complicated exercise. Tai Chi works well in China because senior citizens usually practice under the daily guidance of their instructor. In America it is often difficult for people to make class once or twice per week, let alone daily. Most seniors have a hard time remembering the Tai Chi form and practicing by themselves outside of class. Without repetition at least three or four times per week, exercise is of minimal benefit, and can even be detrimental to health. There are equivalent Qigong exercises that have the same benefits, yet are simpler, more repetitive, and therefore are easier to remember and practice alone.

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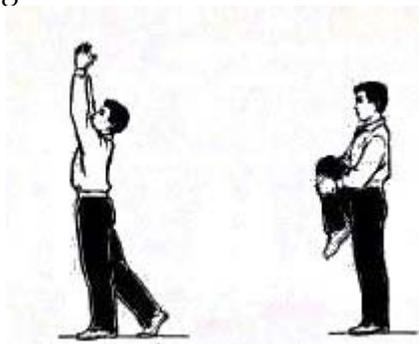
<sup>9</sup> Michael A. Province, Ph.D., Evan C. Hadley, M.D., et al, "The Effects of Exercise on Falls in Elderly Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (May 3, 1995), pp. 1341-47. See also Shuk-Kuen Tse and Diana Bailey, "Tai Chi and Postural Control in the Well Elderly," *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (April, 1992), pp. 295-300.



*Greenbriar, New Jersey seniors playing Tai Chi poses*

### **Qigong Physical Therapy for Specific Problems**

There are also specific Qigong exercises for almost every type of malady: muscular-skeletal problems, internal organ problems, and for many other specific diseases and conditions. For example, two 20th century Shanghai physical therapists, together with Qigong and martial arts masters from the Shanghai Physical Culture Institute, developed a form of Qigong called *Liangong Shr Ba Fa* (18 Refinement Methods) which combines Western physical therapy knowledge and traditional Qigong forms into six exercise sets to treat, respectively: neck and shoulder problems, lower back problems, knee and hip problems, joint problems of the upper and lower limbs, tennis elbow, and internal organ disorders.<sup>10</sup>



*Grasping Knee to Chest from 3<sup>rd</sup> set of Liangong to benefit hips and knees*

One of my patients, a female in her 40's, had long suffered from chronic cervical and lumbar pain as after effects of an automobile accident. Since the soft tissue injuries

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Tung, trans. *Wushu!: The Chinese Way to Family Health & Fitness*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), pp. 106-123

she suffered caused the vertebrae in these areas to chronically subluxate, she had to have monthly chiropractic adjustments to be free from pain. Acupuncture was only effective for her in helping to reinforce the righteous Qi in holding the adjustments a little longer; by itself it did little, insofar as the pain was due to the displaced vertebra. She took up the practice of Liangong Shr Ba Fa at my urging, and later commented that a whole year had elapsed since she had needed any acupuncture or chiropractic adjustments for her condition. Her chiropractor even called her up and told her that he missed her!

### **Qigong and Internal Medicine**

Qigong physical therapy has also proved extremely valuable in treating serious internal disorders. One of the most famous examples of this is that of Madame Guo Lin of Beijing,<sup>11</sup> a woman who created her own variation of Hua Tuo's "Five Animal Frolics" to treat her uterine cancer, which she developed at age 40. Also suffering from arthritis, tuberculosis, and heart problems, she began a daily regimen that soon drove her diseases into remission. Living well into her seventies, she shared her personal discoveries and taught her system to tens of thousands of people, assisting in the documented cancer cures of over 300 patients and the improvement of thousands of others. Her system became known as *Guo Lin Qigong*.



*Group of cancer patients in a Beijing park practicing Guo Lin's Qigong*

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<sup>11</sup> *The Wonders of Qigong*, *ibid.* pp. 94-95

Another system, called *Shu Xin Ping Xue Qigong*, is specifically used for the treatment of heart diseases. It has been proven beneficial for angina, hypertension, and congestive heart failure.<sup>12</sup>

There exist many other Qigong forms for treatment of specific diseases such as obesity, ulcers, eye problems, epilepsy, Raynaud's syndrome, asthma, emphysema, arthritis, diabetes, herpes, and many other chronic health problems.

I have found through personal clinical experience that when patients practice Qigong, they respond more dramatically to acupuncture and herbal therapies and recover more quickly.

## QIGONG AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Over the latter half of the 20th century, chronic stress and its debilitating effects have been cited as either primary or secondary causes in the onset or prognosis of over one hundred diseases.

**Well, if it's worked for 5,000 years, I suppose it's worth a try....**

Oriental Medicine has, for its entire history, acknowledged the influences of stress, chronic negative emotions and their causative and contributory effects on health problems. An interesting fact is that many of the modalities of stress management used in Western medicine are drawn from Oriental medicine. These include such methods as breathing exercises, visualization, meditation, progressive relaxation, and physical exercise. These "new" medical treatments are actually thousands of years old!

### **Breathing Exercises**

Breathing exercises are used in every Western stress management program. The term "Qigong" itself is sometimes translated as "breathing exercise." Sometimes the word "Qi" is used to refer to the life energy circulating through the acupuncture meridians, the "inner breath of life"; in other contexts Qi refers to the breath or air breathed in normal respiration. Respiratory Qigong therapy is often called *tu gu na xin*, or simply *tu-na*, meaning, "Expelling the old, drawing in the new."

Of all our basic requirements to maintain life, nothing is more dear than our breath. We can survive without food for months, without sleep or water for days, but we can only live a few minutes without breathing. Breath is life.

Our breathing is a bridge between our conscious and sub-conscious mind. Breathing is regulated by our autonomic nervous system; it goes on whether we are

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<sup>12</sup> A videotape of this system is available through ordering Sam Masich's *Shuxin Pingxue Qigong* (Wayfarer Publications, item # 1179, (800) 665-9119).

conscious or unconscious, awake or asleep. Yet unlike most autonomic functions, breathing can also be easily regulated by our conscious intent. By controlling the pace and quality of our breathing, we can affect deep changes in our physiological functions.

Breath is also the link between our body and mind. Oriental medicine speaks of The *San Bao* (Three Treasures): *Jing*, *Qi*, and *Shen*. *Qi* is in the middle. From a stress management perspective, the ability of breath control to influence both physical and mental states is vitally important. Some methods of passive progressive relaxation training, such as Autogenic Training (AT), use the mind to relax the body; AT uses mental suggestions, such as, "My body feels heavy and warm" (sensations associated with deep relaxation) to ease physical tension. Other methods, such as physical exercise or "Active Progressive Relaxation", aim at easing mental tension through relaxing the body. More than 60 years ago, one of the pioneers of Western stress management, Dr. Edmund Jacobson, M.D. developed the first series of active progressive relaxation exercises for treating chronic stress and tension. He was quoted as saying, "An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body."<sup>13</sup>

As the link between mind and body, consciously controlling the breath can have a pronounced impact on *both* physical and mental tension. By gently guiding and allowing the breath to adopt the qualities of breathing exhibited during states of deep relaxation (breathing should become quiet, deep, smooth, even, soft, and fine), one can thus induce the accompanying physical and mental states of relaxation.<sup>14</sup>

Breathing exercises have proven to be effective in reducing anxiety, depression, irritability, muscle tension and fatigue, and are also used in treatment and prevention of agoraphobia, hypertension, breath holding, hyperventilation, shallow breathing, and cold hands and feet.<sup>15</sup>

### **Passive Progressive Relaxation**

One passive progressive method (very similar to Autogenic Training) is called *Fang Song Gong* (Relaxation Practice), . *Fang Song Gong* involves deep breathing

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<sup>13</sup> L. John Mason, Ph.D., *Guide to Stress Reduction* (Culver City: Peace Press, 1980), p. 33

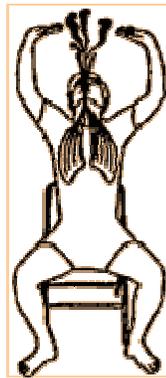
<sup>14</sup> There are many effective Qigong breathing methods. For an in-depth presentation, I suggest the reader refer to Dennis Lewis, *The Tao of Natural Breathing* (San Francisco: Mountain Wind Publications, 1997). Also Ken Cohen's excellent audiotape, *Healthy Breathing* (Boulder: Sounds True, 1996)

<sup>15</sup> Martha Davis, Ph.D., Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, M.S.W., and Matthew McKay, Ph.D., *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, 2nd edition* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 1982), p. 30

combined with auto-suggestion messages such as, "I am quiet....I am relaxed."<sup>16</sup> It can be practiced standing, sitting or lying down, and is easily taught in clinic.

### **Healing Imagery and Visualization**

Other qigong methods, such as *Liu Qi Fa* (The Six Healing Sounds), involve healing imagery and visualization of the organs, their Five Element colors and positive qualities. These have proved effective in treating many physical and emotional maladies, including cancer.<sup>17</sup> At the very least, patients experience an increased sense of well-being and peacefulness. Furthermore, patients feel empowered; they are grateful that they can actively participate in the healing of their own problems, and don't have to suffer the indignation of helplessness or submissively having to totally rely on the medical profession (Eastern or Western) to provide a "fix" for their problems.



*The Lung Sound, SSSSSS, (first of the Six Healing Sounds Qigong)*

### **Qigong Meditation**

Dr. Herbert Benson, M.D. has written numerous reference books documenting the beneficial health effects of meditation from a Western medical perspective.<sup>18</sup> Many patients have already learned Transcendental Meditation techniques, Zen meditation, or yoga, but have let these practices slide as their lives became more hectic. Medical practitioners may suggest to them that their renewal of these practices on a daily basis can have a significant effect on the efficacy of their prognosis. This can give hope where despair previously prevailed. For those who have not studied meditation, there are many simple qigong meditation methods, such as Dan Tian Breathing, which can be quickly and easily taught during an office visit.

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Tung, *ibid.* pp. 124-127

<sup>17</sup> Mantak Chia, *Taoist Ways to Transform Stress Into Vitality* (Huntington, NY: Healing Tao Books, 1985)

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Benson, M.D., *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Avon Books, 1975)

Qigong meditation is not limited to sitting practice. The Daoists speak of the *Four Human Dignities*: standing, sitting, walking, and lying down. Each of these postures has its own forms of meditation. Most of us are familiar with sitting meditation, walking or moving meditations such as Tai Chi, or lying down relaxation techniques such as the "corpse pose" in yoga. However, in the qigong tradition, the most important of all of these is standing meditation. Usually referred to as *zhan zhuang* (standing firm like a post), standing meditation is particularly tonifying, and is an absolutely essential foundation not only for promoting one's own health, but also for accumulating Qi to heal others and for martial arts practice.

Walking meditation is very relaxing as well as strengthening, and helps teach one to integrate meditation into the activities of one's daily life. It is also very soothing and relieves the stiffness after long periods of sitting, especially after seated meditation practice or following long periods in front of a computer. It has some features of active progressive relaxation methods, in that the natural weight shifting from one leg to another causes an alternating tension and relaxation in the muscles. This alternating action also acts like a second heart; it helps to pump the blood out of the legs and assists the venous blood return to the heart.

Lying down meditation is valuable for entering the deepest states of relaxation, since no muscular effort is required. It is especially recommended for people too ill to sit or stand. Daoist and Buddhist yogis practice lying down meditation for dream yoga, and as preparation for being able to continue meditation while dying, when they might be too weak to sit up.

There are lots of varieties of qigong meditation, differing in both outer posture and inner focus. Why so many? The answer is easy: different types of meditation work more effectively for different personality types.

In the Daoist arts, such as classical Chinese medicine, astrology and feng shui, personality is differentiated according to the Five Elements (*wu xing*): metal, water, wood, fire and earth.<sup>19</sup> In Tantric Buddhism, individuals are classified according to the Five Buddha Families with which they are most strongly associated<sup>20</sup>. In the West there are many different schools of differentiating personality types, from the Enneagram<sup>21</sup> to

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<sup>19</sup> There are many resources for determining your elemental type. Harriet Beinfield and Effrem Korngold, *Between Heaven and Earth*. (New York: Ballantine, 1991). For a free online profile, visit Lotus Institute at [www.lotusinstitute.com/5ElementsQuiz.html](http://www.lotusinstitute.com/5ElementsQuiz.html)

<sup>20</sup> See Irini Rockwell, *The Five Wisdom Energies: A Buddhist Way of Understanding Personality, Emotions, and Relationships*. (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2002)

<sup>21</sup> The Enneagram Institute provides excellent information on this fascinating method. For a free Enneagram test, go to [www.enneagraminstitute.com](http://www.enneagraminstitute.com)

the Myers Briggs Personality Indicator.<sup>22</sup> It is very helpful to use one of these measures to determine which type of practice may be best suited for any given individual.

For example, kinesthetic or physical personality types will prefer and excel at energy circulation meditations or progressive relaxation meditations that focus awareness on bodily sensations; they may also prefer standing or walking meditation as these variations are more active. For imaginative, artistic, creative and intuitive people, visualization exercises may be most effective. For heart centered and emotional people, meditations that focus on the transformation of negative emotional Qi into virtuous Qi as related to the Five Elements correspondences are appropriate.

Some people may have reservations about practicing meditation. They may be atheists, or their religious views may make them wary of engaging in "Eastern practices." For those who are atheistic that there are "generic meditations" that require absolutely no faith to practice successfully.<sup>23</sup> For others who adhere to a specific religion, they should choose a meditation practice that embraces their own religious views; there are Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Daoist, and other systems of meditation which use the added benefit of what Dr. Benson has termed "the Faith Factor."<sup>24</sup> In this way people can deeply and profoundly deal with the existential aspects of their malady.

### **Move More to Achieve Stillness**

Active but gentle physical exercise is also one of the recognized tools used in modern Western stress management programs. Yoga, walking, and Tai Chi are three modalities popularly used in the West. In many ways, active exercise mimics the stress response (the sympathetic nervous system's "fight or flight response"): the heartbeat quickens, adrenaline rises, pupils dilate, blood flow to the skeletal muscles increases. When one finishes an exercise workout, the body's natural "cool down phase" self-activates: heartbeat slows down, muscles relax, and adrenaline secretions decrease. This "cool down phase" following physical exercise helps decrease the patient's overall level of accumulated stress.

In China, Qigong and Tai Chi are the most common exercise modalities prescribed specifically for stress. The deep abdominal breathing combined with slow

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<sup>22</sup> The Myers Briggs Personality Indicator has been used widely in many contexts. It is based upon Jungian archetypal personality characteristics, and is exceedingly accurate. For a free online Myers Briggs test profile, go to [www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp](http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp)

<sup>23</sup> For references to generic meditations, I recommend any of Dr. Herbert Benson's books.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert Benson, M.D. with William Proctor, *Beyond The Relaxation Response* (New York: Times Books, 1985), pp. 5-8

graceful motion helps to oxygenate the body, improve blood circulation, move lymphatic fluids, and release skeletal muscle tension. From an Oriental medical perspective, Qigong exercise deepens breathing and opens the chest, tonifies Zong Qi (Ancestral Qi, Pectoral Qi), tonifies and moves Zhen Qi and removes stagnation, moves the Blood, strengthens the muscles and tendons, builds Wei Qi (Defensive Qi), tonifies Heart Qi and calms the Shen (spirit).

#### EXTERNAL QI HEALING (CHINESE THERAPEUTIC TOUCH)

During the reactionary period of China's Cultural Revolution (1965-1975), talk about Qi was officially suppressed. The concepts related to Qi were considered archaic, throwbacks to the superstitions of feudal times. Even acupuncture, although officially sanctioned by the State as a vital part of China's overall health care delivery system, was stripped of all its traditional theories; attempts were made to empiricize point functions and to describe maladies in modern Western medical terminology. Qigong exercises were also officially discouraged, with the exception of Tai Chi.

Toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, a high Communist Party official became gravely ill. Neither Western medicine nor Traditional Chinese Medicine was of any avail. In desperation, he sought out a qigong healer north of Beijing, and was cured. The official then courageously encouraged and defended the development of qigong clinics. Today, hundreds of qigong clinics and hospitals operate across China with official sanction.

#### **Qigong Anesthesia**

On June 21, 1980 at Shanghai No. 8 People's Hospital, a unique surgical operation took place which made world news. A qigong master, Lin Hou Sheng from the Chinese Medicine Research Institute stretched out his right hand and pointed his index and middle fingers at Yin Tang (an acupuncture point) between the eyebrows of the patient. Through his fingertips he emitted *wai qi* (externally projected qi) from a distance of about 3 centimeters on a 29 year old female patient. After three minutes, he nodded to the surgeon who then picked up his sharp scalpel and commenced a surgical operation on a thyroid tumor.

The patient received no additional anesthesia, remained conscious throughout, and did not show even the least sign of pain during the 140 minute operation. When a walnut sized tumor was removed and shown to the patient, a smile lit up her face.



*Lin Hou Sheng using emitted Qi for anesthesia during surgery*

This was the tenth thyroidectomy in little over a month performed with qigong anesthesia at the hospital. Lin, age 41 at the time, has used emitted qi to treat successfully such varied conditions as stomach ulcers, hypertension, urinary incontinence, and protrusions of lumbar vertebra. Since the mid 1980's, due in part to the attention generated by Lin, renewed interest in Qigong and Qigong healing developed into a national fad in China.

More recently, Dr. Wan Sujian, a Chinese army doctor and Director of the Institute of Chinese Daoist Medical Qigong in Beijing, has gained worldwide renown for his success in treating thousands of paraplegic and quadriplegic patients with External Qi Healing. Dr. Wan's army hospital has also searched throughout China for children who exhibit special Qigong healing abilities and has brought them to the hospital for further training as Qigong therapists.<sup>25</sup>

External Qi Healing (*Wai Qi Zhi Liao*) is not usually a primary health care choice for most people. It is mainly resorted to when other conventional treatment methods have failed. The fact that External Qi Healing is successful when nothing else works points to its special value and importance as a limb of Oriental medical practice.

#### **A Scientific Look at Qi Emission**

The Shanghai Atomic Nucleus Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences has identified Lin Hou Sheng's "Wai Qi" as a low-frequency modulated infrared radiation. Other Qigong research in China on emitted Wai Qi from other Qigong healers has measured not only infrared radiation being emitted from their

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<sup>25</sup> *China Healthways Newsletter*, IssueNumber 72 (San Clemente: China Healthways Institute, 1997)

hands, but also low levels of electric energy, electro-magnetic, magnetic, and low frequency modulated infra-sonic sound (8-14 hertz<sup>26</sup>).

Robert O. Becker, M.D., a Syracuse, NY specialist in orthopedics and one of the world's leading research authorities on bio-electricity, has verified that the body responds best not to high currents of electrical stimulus, but to extremely low levels; so low are the beneficial electrical levels (measured in millivolts and nanoamps) that it is only over the past 30 years that scientists have developed equipment sensitive enough to accurately measure these levels. Dr. Becker's research has led to the use in Western hospitals of low level electrical stimulation to treat complicated fractures which are otherwise difficult to heal.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Becker also received one of the first NIH research grants to study acupuncture in the early 1970's. His research determined that the acupuncture meridians are electrical conductors, with the surrounding skin displaying greater conductivity and lesser resistance than the skin in non-meridian locations. He also determined that the acupuncture points act as DC power generators, keeping the electrical flow from diminishing over distance like step-up booster amplifiers.<sup>28</sup>

### **Qigong and Acupuncture: A Synergistic Pair**

External Qi Healing can be effectively combined with acupuncture therapy in the clinical setting. Instead of stimulating the needles through manual manipulation or electro-stimulation, one can project qi directly into the inserted needles using either tonifying or dispersing techniques. One medical Qigong therapist I know, trained in Qigong by her father since age 4, began studying acupuncture in her twenties. After a few months, she went to her teacher and said that she wanted to drop out of the program. When asked why, she said, "Well, I can only feel the Qi through half of the needle." Her teacher exclaimed, "Well, that's remarkable! Most acupuncturists don't feel the Qi through the needle at all!" Nonetheless, she was discouraged, and left acupuncture school because she felt that she could use her hands-on sensitivity to qi more effectively through Qigong therapy alone.

Some Qigong acupuncturists point their palm or fingers directly at the needles, without physical contact. Others sit in the room with the patient and generate a healing field which stimulates the inserted needles, causing them to vibrate in some cases.

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<sup>26</sup> Hertz are modulations per second.

<sup>27</sup> Robert O. Becker, M.D. with Gary Selden, *The Body Electric: Electromagnetism and the Foundation of Life* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1985)

<sup>28</sup> Becker, *ibid.*, pp. 233-236

## **Qigong Healers Fill Health Care Vacuum**

In the early 1980's, as China slowly emerged from the repressive period of the Cultural Revolution (1965-1975), qigong went through a mass renaissance in both national popularity and medical research. Qigong exercises were taught to children in China's elementary and secondary schools to increase intelligence and improve health. By 1990 over one hundred qigong clinics and hospitals existed throughout the country.<sup>29</sup> Hosting the world's largest population, there are still not enough doctors, Western or TCM, to meet China's gargantuan health care demands. Training of External Qi Healers can take as little as one or two years, as compared to 5-10 years for TCM doctors and M.D.'s. It is estimated that at one point, Qigong healers were absorbing 15 percent of the patient load in China's healthcare system.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, with Qigong practice sweeping the nation as a popular fad in the '80's and '90's, the overall health of the people is certain to have improved.

### **Too Much of a Good thing?**

However, in 1999, the Chinese government was rattled when the Falun Gong sect of Qigong, which claimed to have 100 million members worldwide with 80 million in China (outnumbering members of China's Communist Party), surrounded the leaders' compound in Beijing in a protest against arrests of several members. In response, the government declared Falun Gong illegal. Since then, government suspicion of Qigong has caused closings or reduction in staff at many Qigong hospitals and clinics, and shut down many public Qigong schools and practice groups in China's parks.

As has been the case throughout China's recent history, there are now positive signs of a slow rebounding in Medical Qigong practice and Qigong training in China.

### **Western Parallels**

From a Western perspective, all of this non-contact healing business may seem justifiably suspect at first glance, reminiscent of tent show faith healing or mesmerism. Yet many people are surprised to learn that non-contact healing has been researched in the West and accepted as reasonable care in hospitals! Dr. Dolores Krieger, a progressive thinking registered nurse, developed a non-contact healing modality which she named "Therapeutic Touch." Using this method, the therapist's hands do not actually touch the patient, but instead move around the patient's body from a short distance. Research has indicated that patients experience deep states of relaxation and

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<sup>29</sup> Dong, Paul & Esser, Aristide H., *Chi Gong: The Ancient Chinese Way to Health*. (New York: Paragon House, 1990) p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Dong, Paul & Esser, Aristide H., *ibid.* p. 76

well-being as well as swifter recovery time, especially of wounds, when Therapeutic Touch is used as a support treatment modality.<sup>31</sup> Nurses now receive CEU credits for Therapeutic Touch training, and its use is advocated in many hospitals.<sup>32</sup>

Even non-contact healing at great distances, a sub-category of emitted qi therapy, has been scientifically proven to be effective. Larry Dossey, M.D. documents one double-blind experiment involving nearly 400 patients admitted to the coronary care unit of San Francisco General Hospital and treated for heart attack or suspected heart attack. They were evenly sub-divided into two groups. Both groups received state-of-the-art medical care; the only difference was that one group was prayed for as well by Protestant and Catholic prayer groups throughout the country who had only the patients' first names and sketches. The patients in the experimental group had no idea they were being prayed for, yet when the study was concluded, they experienced significantly fewer complications and deaths than did the non-prayer control group.<sup>33</sup>

### **How to Find a Qualified Medical Qigong Practitioner**

There are now national and international Qigong associations. Medical Qigong training programs now exist in China and the United States. Although this is by and large a good thing, I have several serious concerns about the future of Medical Qigong. One of my concerns is that, unfortunately, China is becoming something of a "credentialing factory." Many foreigners visiting China are given "Master Healer Certificates" after as little as 2 to 5 days of Qigong training. If poorly trained amateurs begin to compile a significant proportion of the art's representatives, Medical Qigong will soon fall into disrepute. Fortunately there are also legitimate teachers and schools in China who are more concerned with the quality of their graduates than they are with the quantity.

Another concern is that with the inconsistent quality of existing credentialing and with no credentials required to label oneself a "Qigong healer" by most states, there are many outright charlatans, both in China and abroad, bilking money out of a trusting public. This quackery is already a major concern in China, and I'm afraid that we may have only seen the "tip of the iceberg" over here.

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel P. Wirth, *Unorthodox Healing: The Effect of Noncontact Therapeutic Touch on the Healing of Full Thickness Dermal Wounds*, unpublished study, Healing Sciences International, 29 Orinda Way, Box 1888, Orinda, CA 94563.

<sup>32</sup> Dolores Krieger, Ph.D., R.N., *Accepting Your Power to Heal: The Personal Practice of Therapeutic Touch* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1993); Dolores Krieger, *The Therapeutic Touch* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Larry Dossey, M.D., *Meaning and Medicine: Lessons from a Doctor's Tales of Breakthrough and Healing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991)

Over the last ten to twenty years, a number of reputable Medical Qigong and Qigong Healer programs have sprung up in the United States. These schools, mostly led by well trained teachers, usually offer their own certification of their graduates.

In addition, three respected national organizations now offer certification for Medical Qigong practitioners. The first and foremost of these is the NCCAOM (National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine). The NCCAOM had been board certifying acupuncturists since 1985. Their exams have become nationally recognized; most states now use the NCCAOM diplomate certification as a requirement for state licensure of acupuncturists and Chinese herbalists. They now offer a board certification exam for Asian Bodywork Therapy, which includes Medical Qigong therapy as a recognized field of specialty. Several states now accept this certification as the main requirement for licensure of Asian bodywork professionals, and more are sure to follow.

The AOBTA (American Organization for Bodywork Therapists of Asia) was instrumental in advocating and assisting the NCCAOM in developing their national standards and exam for Asian Bodywork practitioners. The AOBTA has its own certified practitioner professional membership category, as well as a higher level of certified instructor categories, and does its own credentialing and exams. These are in accord with and are recognized by the NCCAOM standards as well.

Last, but not least, the NQA (National Qigong Association) is a non-profit group with members from many different schools and styles of Qigong. Over the past 10 years the NQA Standards and Certification Committees have worked arduously to create certification categories for both Qigong teachers and healers. Their recently revised Medical Qigong standards are also in accord with the NCCAOM and AOBTA categories. They are also the only non-partisan independent Qigong organization offering teacher certification in Qigong.

Most states still have no licensing for Medical Qigong practitioners, and certification is not mandatory. So, patients still have to make their own assessment of their therapist's training and competency. Certainly two years of study with a reputable Qigong master or institute should generally be a minimal standard of competency.

Although I am in favor of credentialing and board certification, I have some caveats with regard to state licensing. Certain aspects of External Qigong Healing are similar to faith healing and "laying on of hands", practices that are exempt from regulation as part of our freedom of religion. In addition, some people seem to be born with "the gift of healing"; although they may have little or no formal training, they may have exceptional natural abilities as energetic healers. For these reasons, attempts to

control non-contact energetic healing might lead us into dangerous legal and ethical ground.

## SUMMARY

Medical Qigong therapy has been a part of Oriental medicine since its birth thousands of years ago. As a complimentary therapy to Western medicine, acupuncture and other Oriental medical methods, it is often the treatment of choice for many illnesses. In addition to receiving the proven benefits of emitted qi therapy, patients can improve their prognosis and feel empowered to be a part of their own healing when encouraged to practice Qigong. We may look forward to the day when Medical Qigong therapy is a part of every hospital in every city of America, and when Qigong practitioners can be found in every park. Let us hold that thought!

THE END

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the titles listed in my footnotes, there are several other books on qigong which I would recommend:

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*Jampa Mackenzie Stewart has practiced qigong for over 35 years, and is certified as a senior Healing Tao Instructor. He has written over 45 published articles on qigong and internal martial arts. Jampa is currently in private practice as an acupuncturist and Medical Qigong therapist, and serves as Executive Director of Healing Tao Institute in Austin, Texas). Healing Tao Institute is offering a Medical Qigong Therapist program. Jampa can be reached at [info@HealingTaoInstitute.com](mailto:info@HealingTaoInstitute.com) or 1-800-HEAL-TAO.*