Liminality, Embodiment and the Six Healing Sounds of Qigong

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LIMINALITY, EMBODIMENT AND

THE SIX HEALING SOUNDS OF QIGONG

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Program in Interdisciplinary Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015
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Dedicated to my beloved companion Mona, without whom I would have probably never started this wonderful journey.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my deepest gratitude to Kathleen Erndl for her constant support and encouragement, and Ben Koen for the many hours we spent discussing the subject and the many possibilities for research the subject promises.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation stems from an ethnographic experience, i.e., a course on the Six Healing Sounds of Qigong taught by Dr Yu Zhang, which I and other students attended in 1991 in Los Angeles, California. The course led to the following questions: What is qigong? What are the Six Healing sounds? Are the claims of this healing tradition to ancient origins accurate? These questions led to the following conclusions: Qigong is indeed a practice of ancient origins, albeit one that comes from different streams of Daoist and medical practices. Its name is a recent design by the Chinese government in the early 1950’s, with the ulterior goal of creating an effective, low cost health care system rooted in Chinese culture.

Apart from the answers provided above, I argue that qigong is a body technology that uses slow, gentle exercises, visualizations and standing and sitting meditations to elicit a state of reverie, a liminal or altered state of consciousness that is conducive to bodily, mental and spiritual experiences and transformation.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation stems primarily from an autoethnographic experience, i.e., a course on the Six Healing Sounds of Qigong taught by Dr Yu Zhang, which I and other students attended in 1991 in Los Angeles, California.

The inspiration for the dissertation is the autoethnographic experience described in a later chapter. It is sensible to place qigong within the larger historical and textual framework first with the intention of unpacking the experiential aspect in a chronological manner, giving the reader time to become familiar with the ideas and notions discussed throughout. After that, and the fundamental notions of Daoism, Chinese Medicine and Qigong, i.e., their worldview and terminology are examined the autoethnographic work will be presented, and will be followed by an interpretation of the experience of practicing the six healing sounds of qigong from a theoretical perspective.

Broadly, this dissertation concerns the subject of qigong, a Chinese healing and longevity practice of ancient origins that uses gentle movement and visualizations and meditations to cultivate qi 氣, the vital energies that all living beings have circulating in their bodies. Qi is an intimate part of life, so much so, that the Daoist say that we live in an ocean of qi. Our own energies can be expanded and extended outside the body. The practice of the six healing sounds of qigong as taught by Dr Zhang merits further examination for several reasons. Qigong is a Chinese healing tradition. Whoever takes up a qigong course does so in search of healing at some level, be it physical, emotional or spiritual. Healing, understood in its broadest sense, is also spiritual nourishment and, especially, the experiencing of the ‘numinous,’ here understood as altered states of consciousness (ASC). In due time, and this depends on the individual, after days, months or years of practice, that experience becomes an everyday life event, an embodiment of the qualities of Dao, and one of the major goals of Daoist and qigong practices. Rooted in Chinese medicine from ancient times is the notion that the best medicine is preventive medicine, curative medicine coming only second. Qigong, as a modality of
Traditional Chinese Medicine, places emphasis on prevention as well, but it is essentially both, preventive and curative.

During the course and practice of this particular type of the six healing sounds of *qigong*, I experienced different states of consciousness, states markedly different from ordinary, everyday states of mind, and which led to the questions: What happened there? What are these different states of awareness? How was my body-mind able to “go” to such places? These questions were followed by: What is *qigong*? How does the six healing sounds tradition or *Liu Zi Jue*, fit within it? What are the historical parameters? What does the historical record show? From here the textual tradition had to be examined, a lore that, from its beginnings, has kept growing through the centuries.

**Methodology**

The question “what is *qigong*?” is approached from an anthropological and phenomenological, as well as historical and textual standpoint. From the experiential component stem the other questions related to history, texts through the ages, and the theoretical framework. The unpacking of such experience is at the core of this work, since without it this work would simply not have been possible. It is my own personal story and the insights that came from the experience that drives the dissertation.

**Autoethnography: A Personal narrative**

When I attended Dr Zhang’s, I did not realize at the time that what I was doing was going to become part of an ethnographic work. I simply attended and tried to learn as much as possible. It was years later, when I had to put down the experience into words that I realized that I had to tell a part of my own story, an autobiographical account of events I once
experienced. This manner of conducting ethnography, in anthropological terminology, is described as autoethnographical. \(^1\) This type of ethnography affords us the opportunity to straddle both worlds, the personal, intimate experience of, in this case, an age-old tradition, thus connecting autobiographical story with its concomitant and self-reflective and interpretative elements, with a larger anthropological, historical, textual and theoretical framework. It is a form of participant observation, but it also goes beyond it, since its focus is mostly on the subject experiencing the events, i.e., me. As Edith Turner points out regarding her experiences with the Inupiaq, “If I were to attempt a medical and strictly objective academic tone it would be impossible to convey the typical ….. intimacy of the scenes. To pretend that the anthropologist was not there, or not involved, would be false, as would the assumption that I was without religion myself.” \(^2\)

Autoethnography is a work of self-representation and self-reflexivity, the essence of this type of ethnography thus, is telling one’s own story. This “act of self narrative”\(^3\) is what I am doing when I describe my very personal representation of the events experienced in that class. “The term,” writes Deborah Reed-Danahay, “has a double sense – referring to either the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest.”\(^4\) However, according to Reed-Danahay, the idea is to break down that dichotomy. When the dual nature of the meaning of autoethnography is apprehended, it is a useful term with which to question the binary conventions of self/society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective.”\(^5\) Garance Marechal is also of the idea that autoethnography is a method of research that involves “self observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing.”\(^6\)

The fact that this is work based on my own experience, i.e., an exploration on my own lived events, is what distinguishes it from other forms of ethnographies and, furthermore,

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1 Some works on auto ethnography include: Karen McCarthy Brown. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in*


4 Ibid. 2

5 Ibid.

makes the dissertation on the subject of qigong unique in that it includes an ethnographic work, thus departing from current scholarship.

As mentioned earlier, qigong is, first and foremost, a healing tradition. Also important is the fact that it is a living one. It is a discipline that has been put into practice by perhaps hundreds of thousands or more people since ancient times, and most certainly millions in the modern era. Some ancient and medieval Chinese practitioners, as well as some more modern ones, have written down their thoughts and experiences through the ages, and have left signposts of what the practices entail; by now it has transcended the borders of its original cradle, i.e., China, to reach close to the entire globe.

After examining the history, it will be useful to look at this tradition through some lens that allows us to put it in perspective, and understand what qigong is from a simple practical point. For qigong is something that one “does.” There is too an essential inner component that makes qigong a practice that is both corporeal and spiritual. The Chinese call this a “dual practice.” The body is exercised but so is the mind (and spirit). This body technology and the different states of consciousness that one may experience during and after practice make qigong a particular kind of discipline.

It is not the purpose of this study to either prove or disprove the effectiveness of qigong, rather, to look at it in its own context, as part of a worldview. Moreover, after the historical and qualitative approaches have been presented, the subject will be addressed from an interpretive point of view. The matter of healing and of its subsequent side effect, to wit, longevity, as claimed by the tradition from its incipience, will be approached from this interpretive perspective; in particular the lived experience from my own standpoint and the light I attempt to shed on it by bringing in the concepts of liminality and embodiment. The former is a notion put forth by anthropologist Victor Turner; the latter we find within the tradition itself.

Thus, in this dissertation I argue that when the qigong exercises, either bodily movements or sitting meditations, and any combination of these, are performed, they take the practitioner into different states of consciousness. From the notions of “universe,” and qi, and of a world that is completely alive and essentially all Dao, the “Way,” the ultimate reality, the
world of a practitioner that imbues his or her soul with such thoughts and practices ‘falls’ or enters into the realm of what Victor Turner called *liminality*. Victor Turner defined liminality as the “threshold,” that state that is neither here nor there; using this concept and applying it to *qigong*, we can say that it is a state of mind into which the practitioner steps and that is fundamentally atypical from our everyday mind, everyday ‘reality. Turner’s ideas on liminality will be presented and developed more fully in the interpretive section.

If the mind enters into that realm of liminality, so does the body. In Daoism, body and mind are literally one, i.e., facets of *qi*, although there are clear distinctions to be understood between both of them. The liminal realm is entered in *qigong* and it is while in this *bodymind* state that the doors are open for healing and transformation. For this is the state that embodies the qualities of Dao, of free flow of energies, of balance of yin and yang, of unity with the Dao and, as Karlfried Graf Durkheim put it, “transparent to the creative and liberating influence ’of Primordial Life whose transcendental unity he shares in his own being.”

**The Experience**

The course was such a powerful event that it left me, for years to come, with a keen desire to learn more about this ancient tradition. Not much was known at the time about *qigong*, and few western scholars had written about the subject. All we had to go on at the time was the actual teachings imparted by a number of Chinese, Taiwanese and other Asian practitioners/teachers who had moved to the US, as well as a few books which some of them had written on the subject.

Thus, I set out to unpack the events experienced in that course. The experience described in the ethnographic piece was a body-oriented practice that could, at the same time,

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8 Chinese can be found all over Asia. Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore among others. They often keep whatever their vernacular language was back in China alive, and most other traditions they brought with them as well. A prime example is Mantak Chia, a Thai born Chinese that has made a name for himself teaching *qigong* all over the USA and Europe. Of course, many Chinese instructors can be found in American cities with large populations of Chinese. Los Angeles, and San Francisco are the main ones in the USA.
take one’s mind or spirit soaring through different states of consciousness; these ranged from a light trance to other, deeper states of body awareness and sometimes feelings of incorporeality, of energy coursing through different parts of the body, warm and/or cold spots, tingling, etc.

The course consisted of two sessions per week for four weeks, and, although every class was slightly different in outcome, when it came to sensations and mind states, they were consistently distinct consciousness-wise. This first made an impression, and second, I thought, obviously merited further examination. It was evident, that the effects of the practice were consistent and seemed to be cumulative, meaning that the more one practices, the easier it becomes to enter in that liminal state of mind conducive to embodiment and transformation (healing, wholeness, well being).

I found out, as a result of conducting research for this dissertation, that the version of the six healing sounds “style” of qigong as taught by Dr Zhang, was hundreds, and, in primitive form, perhaps thousands of years old. But at the time of the course no one had a clear view of the origins as presented in the historical records; and to a great degree, none of the participants had any interest in finding out about these primordial origins either. To know, or rather, to believe, that we were learning an ancient practice, with origins lost in the mists of time, simply added to the sense of mystery and power of the tradition. I was fortunate to be able to train under the guidance of this Chinese Qigong master, and many of his practices and instructions remain clear in my mind and form part and parcel of my own practice and teaching.

The History

From the experience, then, also came the need to look at qigong and the six healing sounds from a historical perspective and find out how much we really know about its origins and developments. When investigating the historical perspective, both ancient and recent, I did not want to taint it with any theoretical or interpretive perspective; rather, I wanted to look at it from a purely concrete, data centered point of view. I am omitting these perspectives
because I find that they would not serve the point I am making in this section of the work. The main question regarding this section is to simply answer the question: where does qigong come from? How old is it? etc., in other words, the Who? When? Where? Thus, I find no need to examine it any further than that, and lay on it other concepts that might bog down our inquiry. We will have enough time to do that when it comes to the interpretive, theoretical part of it.

Qigong, then, can be traced to, first shamanism, then to the ancient practices of Daoyin that most likely derived from the latter. Daoyin 導引 is the Longevity tradition par excellence. The earliest references take us back to the writings of Zhuangzi in the fourth century B.C.E., and the findings of Mawangdui from the second century BCE. And there is, however, some more fragmentary data that points to earlier origins as well.

It is important to note that the six healing sounds make up one of a myriad of qigong so-called “styles” or gongfa. In other words, the six healing sounds of qigong, is qigong. It is one more manifestation and expression of the notions of qi, yin/yang, the five phases, etc., and other Daoist and Chinese medicine tenets put into practice. The textual tradition, old and new, bears this out by treating the subject of qigong and the six healing breaths, as it is called in them, in the same texts, under the same rubric. Thus, after describing the history of the six healing breaths we were able to put that practice squarely within the larger ‘qigong’ or longevity, tradition. We were also able to discern Master Ni’s and the yellow court traditions as the closest approximations to the styles of the six healing sounds taught in modern times and, especially, as taught by Dr Zhang.

The recent history, it turns out, is much more fascinating than the already absorbing and mysterious ancient lore. Here we encountered what seldom happens, in a clear and deliberate manner: qigong is an invented tradition. This new “qigong” 氣功 was certainly based on the ancient teachings, schools and lineages of both traditional medicine and Daoism. However, it brought them together in a way with which the ones who hold these old lineages and traditions might otherwise disagree. Despite this objection, qigong became an umbrella term that would describe almost any exercise and/or meditations that used the notions of qi, of quietude, Dao, yin and yang, etc, i.e., the major tenets of Daoism and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

In 1949, in what was going to be a very fortuitous turn of events, the Chinese
Communist Party (CCP) stumbled upon a healing modality that was not only effective but also essentially Chinese. This latter point was important for the CCP, whose intentions at the time were to somehow unify the country under the new regime, and also rescue what was most valuable of the old “feudal and superstitious” traditions and turn them into renewed institutions at the service of the people. Excised of spurious notions, *qigong*, always conceived as another modality of Chinese Medicine, and usually prescribed by Chinese doctors trained in *qigong*, could become an exceptionally powerful healing technology, a low cost instrument for the health and well being of the new nation’s citizens. Efforts were made to transform this ancient, and oftentimes mystical tradition, into a scientific endeavor sanctioned by the new authorities as well as brightest scientist China had produced. Thus, *qigong* could “lead to revolutionary discoveries of ways to harness the powers of the human mind,” something that contained “the key to the mysteries Traditional Chinese wisdom without the dross of religion or superstition.”

But this new approach to *qigong* had its detractors, and although they fought the idea of *qigong* based on the same “feudal and superstitious” argument, and remained always lurking in the background, they were not able stop the rise of *qigong* to the level of a “fever” in the 80’s and 90’s. Thus, during the period of the “*qigong* fever,” several notable figures “came down from the mountains.” This is a traditional poetic image to denote the beginning or resuming of public life after a period of isolation or retreat in pursuit of spiritual endeavors. Thus, they became known, and some of them renown, for their healing powers which the practice of *qigong* had conferred upon them. Qigong had survived the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, events that left millions dead in its wake, to thrive in the following decades.

However, after a series of events that put *qigong* in the spotlight but in a disapproving light this time, *qigong* began seeing its twilight. This happened especially, but not only, because

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of the “qigong deviations,” the negative effects that qigong can potentially trigger, to wit, loss of control of qi, headaches, untraceable aches and pains, sensations of ‘energy,’ and also exacerbation of psychotic episodes among other things. As these negative effects became more widely known, it allowed the rise of the enemies of qigong, who still considered it nothing but a remnant of ‘feudal and superstitious’ beliefs and suspiciously similar to religious expressions that had to be done away with and supplanted by the positively scientific and materialistic western medicine. To make matters worse, the Falun Gong\textsuperscript{10} debacle ensued, bringing down on them not only the wrath of the authorities that ultimately sealed their fate, but affecting, and virtually ending, the entire qigong milieu. An era of suppression and punishment for the Falun Gong practitioners followed, repression that lasts to this day.

**Liminality**

Victor Turner, based on the work of French Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage* developed further the idea of liminality. According to Van Gennep’s work there are certain cultural rituals characterized by periods of separation from the usual social interactions. The latter are characterized as times of “structure of positions”, the “basic model of society.”\textsuperscript{11} We must regard”, he says, “the period of margin or ‘liminality’ as an intercultural situation.”\textsuperscript{12} Van Gennep describes the *rites de passage* as consisting of three phases: separation, margin (or limen) and aggregation. This transition involves a change of state, which, according to him, can be understood as a change from one relatively fixed cultural condition into another. For Turner this period entails a process of becoming, and even, of transformation.

Thus, the first part involves separation and detachment from the social structure by symbolic behavior, “from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural

\textsuperscript{10} Falun Gong is another qigong style. It was made popular by another of the qigong superstars, Li Hongzhi, who rose to prominence during the qigong boom. There will be a brief discussion on this qigong movement at the end of Chapter 3.


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid
conditions (a state)." The next phase, however, is the stage of the passenger, of the ambiguous traveler, the one that is neither here nor there. The ‘passenger’ comes from a world tangible and known, but in the liminal state he or she “passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.” In the coming state of reaggregation or reincorporation, the passage is consummated. Once more the stability of the new state has been established and the voyager between the realms has arrived at his or her new destination.

Victor Turner’s ideas on liminality, then, will help in our understanding of how the practice of qigong brings the practitioner to the threshold, a mental or spiritual state of ambiguity and marginality, the door that takes him or her to the world of embodiment and transformation. This state does not have to be a deep trance, although it can definitely take the practitioner there.

The state of liminality is no that far from the common state of mental awareness. But it is far enough to make a difference. Just as entering into the alpha waves frequencies of mental activity, it does not take a superhuman effort to access this ASC. The slowness of the movements, for instance, movements uncharacteristic in our normal way of conducting our bodies in daily life, for example, is enough to trigger a state that is distinctly other. And there are additional elements of the practice that have the same effect on consciousness.

Qigong creates that liminal atmosphere without and within. The outer aspects of the liminal state, is called the “qi field.” Practicing individually or in a group i.e., unifying the mind-intent or yi (意), will, with almost no exception, generate this ‘qi field.’ This individual or group

13 Ibid 47
14 Ibid

Altered States of Consciousness, John Wiley & Sons; 1st edition (June 1969), provides a more comprehensive look at the subject.

The term "altered state of consciousness" was introduced and defined by Ludwig in 1966. An altered state of consciousness is any mental state induced by physiological, psychological, or pharmacological maneuvers or agents, which deviates from the normal waking state of consciousness. Some observable abnormal and sluggish behaviors meet the criteria for altered state of consciousness. Altered states of consciousness can also be associated with artistic creativity or different focus levels. They also can be shared interpersonally and studied as a subject of sociological research. Wikipedia, Last Accessed 3/28/2015.
energy, an energy that is also consciousness, definitely supports the entering into the liminal state.

**Embodiment**

A few minutes of practice have not only a momentary transformative effect, but it also lasts for a considerable number of hours after one is done with the ‘exercises’. What that means is that a half hour or one hour of *qigong* practice will leave the person feeling calmed and centered, relaxed, yet focused, to give a few examples, and, if practiced consistently, this state, becomes part of the person’s make up and the natural state of mind and body. This ‘natural’ condition is what will be called the state of embodiment, something that becomes part of the practitioner’s personality and character. From a Daoist point of view, the state of energies flowing freely in the body, the balancing of yin and yang, and the spontaneous ending of inner strife, not fighting what is, ergo the notion of transparency to the Dao or Being, all these elements are reflected as ‘health,’ but clearly point to a very different dimension of a person’s state of being. This notion of embodiment is not found in Daoism and the longevity tradition alone. Discussing the notion of embodiment as found in the Sufi tradition, Ben Koen says, that it is “not limited to the body, nor does it accept a mind-body dichotomy. Rather, embodiment refers to a process of transformation through which a human being, comprising intellect, body, and soul, known as *aql*, *tan*, and *ruh*, internalizes and manifests virtues, positive ideas and energy.” This is very much in step with our findings of how the Chinese understand embodiment brought about by constant practice of some form of *qigong* or another, of which, as we will see soon, there are many.
The Questions

After the course and my experience with Dr. Zhang in general, the question is: what is the meaning of all this? When I speak of qigong, whether teaching or in conversation, I am often asked, what is qigong? This question does not have a simple answer. Therefore, I want to find out what qigong is. Where does it come from? What are its origins, either ancient or recent? Where did the six healing sounds originate? Is it another manifestation of a much broader set of ideas and principles? And also, where does the six healing sounds tradition according to Dr. Zhang fit within the qigong milieu?

I argue that qigong is a practice that elicits a liminal state, and that liminal, ‘threshold’ state of mind, is conducive to healing and transformation; moreover, that this liminal state is the requisite for the embodiment of energies and consciousness that make transformation possible.

The Fundamental Notions of Daoism and Qigong

Before treating the subject of liminality and embodiment in qigong and the six healing sounds, it is important that we examine the fundamental notions and ideas of Daoism and Chinese Medicine, however briefly. Some of these have been mentioned several times in the previous chapters, to be sure; however, an exploration and explanation of them are in order if we want to comprehend how the practice of qigong is a window into that liminal state, and how the Dao, in whatever level of intensity or transparency, is a goal to be achieved in the body. The ‘world’ of qigong encompasses the whole breadth of life: from the absolute realm of Dao beyond what words or images can describe, the ultimate reality beyond conceptualization and ungraspable solely with our everyday intellect, to the less ethereal manifestations of the Dao, to the increasing densification of reality until it becomes solid as the world we perceive with out senses. The opposite is also the process of achieving the Dao: a steady process of
rarification of one’s energies until, the Dao, the ultimate Being becomes a living force in the body, i.e., is embodied. Livia Kohn expresses this idea thus,

Feeling the qi in its different levels within, refining sexual energy (jing) into qi and qi into spirit (shen), they [the practitioners] systematically reorganize their experience to a wider, more inclusive, more open, a strongly cosmic level.17

The Body

“In every time and place the interior of the living human body has been a work of the imagination, fashioned from social ideals as well as from physical data.”18 Every culture constructs ideas of the body according to different cognitive ingredients. For the Europeans the body was built from visible, tangible forms, the organs, the anatomical structures, tissues, fluids etc. For the early Chinese, on the other hand, the body was composed of vaguely defined bones and flesh traversed by the flowing vital forces, and especially, a system of functions in the body. Of great import is the notion that the body as a microcosm, i.e., a reflection of the many facets and rhythms of the macrocosm.19 The body’s anatomy was not a main concern, the exact location of the organs; their physical correlates did not play the obvious salient role they did in ancient western medicine. In this scheme of things, they are not “as much anatomical features as offices in the central bureaucracy of the body,” although they were well aware of “skin, bones, sinews, and guts,” this does not mean that they had a real interest in their anatomical relevance. Thus, following the idea of the body-world as microcosm and macrocosm, the Huangdi neijing says:

... In the year there are 365 days; human beings have 365 joints. On the earth there are high mountains; human beings have shoulders and knees. On the earth there are

19 Ute Engelhardt. Opus cit. 95
deep valleys; human beings have armpits and hollows in back of their knees. On the earth there are twelve cardinal watercourses; human beings have twelve cardinal circulation tracts. In the earth there are veins of water; human beings have defensive qi. On the earth there are wild grasses; human beings have body hair. On the earth there are daylight and darkness; human beings have their [times for] lying down and getting up.  

Medical texts focused on describing, in vivid detail, how the body and its functions relate to the macrocosm. This was the basis for diagnosis and therapy. And also, as the body was described as the image of a country, it also was viewed as a reflection of functions of the administration of the state.  

We can, then, safely say that since Classical Chinese Medicine was not based on a strict anatomical view of the body, structures was not a salient feature of their theories.

The Body's Inner Landscape

As mentioned earlier, nowadays the term qigong encompasses a vast array of different, somewhat disparate longevity and more mystical practices that include sitting meditations and visualizations, and movements that are characterized by being deliberately slow, silk-like, and guided by yi意 or mind intent, that is, accompanied by a state of awareness and intention. Many of these different practices used to belong (and still do) to different lineages and had at their core similar goals. All, however, share, for the most part, the fundamental tenets of Daoism and Chinese Medicine, varying mainly in the degree of the goal, that is, if the practice is geared towards the maintenance of health, the recovery from an unhealthy state or illness or the goal entails more lofty aims such as experiencing the Dao, achieving union with the Dao or immortality. They all, nonetheless, share common elements.

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21 Ibid, 5. On this Sivin says, “In China ideas of Nature, state, and the body were so interdependent that they are best considered a single complex.”
In all cases, the same understanding of the fundamentally energetic nature of the human body-mind pervades all three levels and the same practices are used in various forms, depending on whether the goal is health, extended life span, or complete transcendence of this world.\textsuperscript{23}

Moreover, they all assume that the practice of \textit{qigong} will create a liminal atmosphere (the \textit{qi} field) a mind-body state conducive to transformation, and ultimately, transparency and embodiment of the Dao.

We have gone over some of the elements of Chinese thinking with regards to the body and its relationship between the body and the outer ‘world.’ We have also seen how the practitioners of longevity practices used their discipline as a ‘body centered religiosity.’ However, what are the bases for this religiosity? How is the body the locus of such practice?

The theme of inner and outer world will always be present. Thus, in step of microcosm and macrocosm view of the world, of one aspect reflecting or mirroring the other, Daoism, and Chinese Medicine, envision the body as a country, this image being itself a reflection of the world they lived in. Their idea of the body is that it is in complete connection and interrelation with the world. ‘The human body is the image of a country’ say the Daoists.\textsuperscript{24} In the body they see “mountains and rivers, ponds, forests, paths and barriers, a whole landscape laid out with dwellings, palaces, towers, walls and the gates sheltering a vast population. It is a civilized state, administered by their lords and ministers.”\textsuperscript{25}

For the Daoists the image also connotes the way in which one is to take care of the body, understanding that the body partakes of the essential nature, and is the reflection of, the Dao. Addressing a Tang emperor in 711 AD, the Daoist master Ssu ma Cheng-chen replied to the question, “to care of the body, to practice Non-action is al very well, but who will govern the country?” The Daoist master replied, “The country is like the body: follow the nature of things, don’t let your mind harbor any partiality, and the whole world will be governed.”\textsuperscript{26}

The country, the outer world, in this case, is governed by the emperor’s inner being. The emperor in China was always responsible for the well being of the people, and this included

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{23} Livia Kohn. \textit{Chinese Healing Exercises}. 9
\bibitem{24} Kristofer Schipper. \textit{The Taoist Body}. University of California Press (March 19, 1994). 100
\bibitem{25} Ibid 102
\bibitem{26} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
natural occurrences such as floods, earthquakes and famines, among other things. If anything went array in the realm, the emperor had to bring his inner being in alignment with the Dao in order to bring order to the land once more, oftentimes by incurring some form of penance.\footnote{ibid 103}

For the ordinary person this is true in another sense. He or she is definitely influenced by the outer environment, and to a large degree, ruled by it. However, for the one that has received “initiation of the body, and who knows the laws of nature, the flow of influence is reversed.”\footnote{ibid 103}

The obvious takeaway here is that the inner world, our inner attitude, mental and emotional and therefore bodily states, may or may not be in harmony, encompasses our inner “world” and must be in order for our actions to have any enduring effect. Trying to act on the world from state of internal disarray is, from the Daoist point of view, almost fruitless. The action must be a spontaneous reflection of the harmony existent in the inner world, i.e., an embodied being transparent to the Dao. That is why the Daoist concept of \textit{wu-wei}, 無為 non-action, is so important in our understanding of the Dao; how the Dao “does nothing but accomplishes everything;” for \textit{wu wei} is fundamentally a state of being, and as such, a state of being that reflects the transparency to the Dao. Thus, acting from this state of embodiment is also not acting; it is an action that is so totally in harmony with the Dao that there is no effort or desire to coerce the world into being anything else than what it naturally and spontaneously is. It is from this state of being that ‘right’ action can take place; only then the action will last.

The king models himself on heaven. He models himself on its seasons and consummates them. He models himself on its commands and circulates them among all men. He models himself on its constant categories and uses them when initiating affairs. He models himself on its Way and thereby makes order emerge. He models himself on its will and thus commits [his realm] to benevolence.\footnote{Nathan Sivin. State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C. Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jun., 1995), pp. 12}
1. Daoist image of the body’s inner landscape\textsuperscript{30}

The Subtle Body

The image is representative of the way that Daoism and Chinese Medicine think of, and envision, the body. They do, nonetheless, teach an inner landscape, albeit oftentimes a somewhat different version, or a variation more useful for internal practices, of the classical description such as the one in the figure above. The six healing breaths is a good example of the inner landscape described in this practice. It assumes all the principles and elements that Chinese Medicine holds for the body and the world, and then adds a few more that are specific to the longevity and meditative practices. It is an expansion in the direction of the cosmos, of the reflection of two aspects of the universe and life, the micro and the macro. Regarding the body, the inner landscape and the Dao, Livia Kohn says,

The body in traditional China is closely connected to and even a replica of the Dao 道. The Dao is at the base of all creation; it is the fundamental productive power of the universe that causes things to come into existence and maintains them throughout. There is only one Dao, and all beings are part of this Dao, although most are not aware of it. People, the ancient texts say, are in the Dao like fish are in water.

Like water, the Dao is everywhere—around us, in us, with us. It flows naturally along its channels—in the body, in nature, in society. It is steady, fluid, easy, soft and weak; it never pushes, fights, or controls but is powerful by merely going along. People do not know it, but it the Dao always there, always sustaining, like a mother—the mother of the universe, the mother of all existence, the mother of all of us. It brings forth and nurtures; it cares and raises; it supports and moves along. Whatever we do, whoever we are, whatever we become, it is always part of the Dao.  

2. Major points and fields in the subtle body.
Qi 氣

The world, the body, the stars, the moon, are all a manifestation of qi, the life force without which life would not be possible. One aspect of qi is like the notion of electrons or the concept of electricity: qi is not readily visible; yet we can know it exists and that it works, by the effects, the outer phenomena it produces. From a more fundamental and original perspective, it is also key to keep in mind that the Chinese word qi 氣, is strongly associated with air, and especially with the breath.

Matter is Qi taking shape. Mountains forming, forests growing, rivers streaming, and creatures proliferating are all manifestations of Qi. In the human being, all functions of the body and mind are manifestations of Qi. In the sensing, cogitating, feeling, digesting, stirring, and propagating. Qi begets movement and heat. It is the fundamental mystery and miracle.  

Qi, then, is the direct, tangible manifestation of the Dao. Qi is the materia prima for the magnus opus of creation. Everything we see in the world is a manifestation of qi, and qi is the material reflection of the Dao. Thus, the body is a manifestation of qi. The body moves, breathes, and thinks because of qi. However ubiquitous qi is, in its subtle form, is not commonly visible to the naked eye or any other of the physical senses. It courses through every aspect of the world and every facet of the body, and yet we cannot ‘just’ see it or feel it. It takes a special type of activity or training to access it, a special kind of awareness or consciousness. Through the meridians or channels it traverses the entire body, but these channels, the currents of qi, have no physical anatomical correspondence. That is because the meridians form part of a ‘subtle’ aspect of the body. This aspect of qi, then, seems to intersect the physical world. It exists but it takes a special kind of mind to know it, and a special knowledge to access it (such as acupuncture or qigong, among others). Acupuncture points, those vortexes of energy or relay stations of qi, can be found in the body, but at the same time they are not of the body. One cannot perform an autopsy of a human body (or animal, there is animal acupuncture too)
and expect to see the meridians and the hundreds of acupuncture vortexes that punctuate it. Nor can the Yogic cakras, the big centers of energy called dantian in Chinese. They are just not there in the way that the organs, tissues and arteries are there. Qi and acupuncture channels exist, but they exist in a different dimension, as it were. That is why the place where they are found is commonly called the “subtle body” in other traditions such as yoga. Qi, then, and the acupuncture points on the qi currents, exist very literally in a different ‘world.’ “At the ‘articulations’ within the body there are 365 points of communication... ‘Articulations’ refers to where the divine qi travels freely and moves outward and inward, not to skin, flesh, sinews and bones.”

And it is into this subtle body, that the liminal state achieved by the practice of qigong aims at affecting.

Since everything is qi, it is inescapable that the qi of the universe, of the outer world, will have an influence on the inner world of the body and of course, on the shen or spirit that animates it. Qi permeates the whole universe. It permeates the body, the trees, and mountains; nothing under the sun is not permeated by qi. Thus, following this idea of permeability, qi from the outside permeates the inside, and vice versa. “Since ancient times [it has been understood that] penetration by [the qi of] heaven is the basis of life, which depends on [the universal qi of] yin and yang. The qi [of everything] in the midst of heaven and earth and in the six directions, from the nine provinces and nine body orifices to the five visceral systems and the twelve joints, is penetrated by the qi of heaven.”

The interaction is also reflected in the ingestion of air and food as well as the excretion of waste from the body. The pores play an important role as well, aside from the orifices, through which pernicious influences can affect the health of the individual.

Food and air, are of course sources of qi. Life itself, though, begins through an accumulation of universal qi. As Zhuangzi put it, “The birth of a human being amounts to an

accumulation of qi. When it has accumulated, birth takes place; when it has dissipated, death takes place.”

Commenting on this passage Ute Engelhardt says,

“This passage does not speak of the material substance of the body but refers strictly to the energies that make the vital functions possible. The physical vitality of a baby, therefore, is drawn from the qi that fills the cosmos before birth; at the moment of birth, it begins to dissipate.37

Thus, from the concept of dissipation of qi after birth stems the notion of replenishing and maintaining of vital energies through longevity techniques with its concomitant instructions to avoid excesses and uncontrolled states of mind and emotions.

There are two types of energies at play: the internal energies driving the order and vitality of the body as well as the forces of chaos and disorder that may come from outside or inside. Orthopathic qi (zhengqi 正氣) is the one to maintain the internal bodily processes flowing and in harmony. Heteropathic qi (xieqi 邪氣) is the agent of disorder, the energies that go against the grain of healthy order.38 There are many different kinds of qi acting in the body aside from these two forces. One of the main tasks of the individual is to practice longevity techniques precisely to renew these energies, to discard the heteropathic and disruptive agents of health and let in the new, fresh agents of harmony and health in, time and again. The idea is to keep the energies flowing freely in the body, maintaining this flow smoothly is a sign of health. Blockages in the channels, will later be blockages in the tissues and will lead to disharmonies of some type.

36 Nathan Sivin. Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China. Center for Chinese Studies, The Universi
(January 1, 1987) 48
Channels or Conduits

Qi flows throughout the body in a network of channels (jingmo 經脈) that pervade the entire body. The qi is further differentiated according to the orbs or organs associated with the respective channels, and it does this in a cyclical rhythm and in sequences of about two hours. Thus, liver qi for example is at its peak between 11 pm and 1 am; the heart qi between 11 am and one pm, etc. Qi also follows the sequence of the five phases, notion clearly delineated in the practice of some qigong styles and definitely used in the six healing sounds.

The acupuncture meridians, as they are usually called today, have been part and parcel of the concepts of Chinese medicine since the first century B.C. They run directly below the skin, although they go, in parts, deep into the body as well. An example of the latter is the zhong mai 中脈 or middle channel, that runs from the top of the head to the perineum on a straight line. This channel is used mainly in the practice of some forms of qigong.

Meridians are the channels or pathways that carry Qi and Blood through the body. They are not blood vessels. Rather, they comprise an invisible lattice that links together all the fundamental textures and Organs. In Chinese Meridian theory, these channels are unseen but are thought to embody a kind of informational network – the Qi and Blood move along them, and a therapeutic system is conceptually organized through the details of its design.

The qi on the channels can be influenced by the use of acupuncture needles, moxibustion (the burning of Artemisia Vulgaris), massages, and, more importantly for our purposes, by placing our attention (yi) on the acupoint. These are the ‘caverns’ of qi through which qi is able to enter and exit. As the body, and everything else, is permeable to qi, these points or vortexes are important in the exchange of energies with its surroundings and the

39 Ute Engelhardt. Opus cit. 97
universe at large. According to some texts, some of these points are defined as the residence of gods.\[^{41}\]

**Orbs**

The channels are associated with twelve vaguely defined viscera, or orbs, which are also linked to the notions of *yin* and *yang* system as well as the five phases, or five elements. In Chinese Medicine Theory these orbs are called the *zangfu* 脏腑 ‘organs’ or rather, visceral systems of function.

Following the *yin yang* theory, the six *zang* orbs correspond to six *yin* orbs, i.e., Heart, Liver, Spleen, Lung, Kidney. The *fu* orbs, are *yang* and correspond to the Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Gall Bladder, Urinary Bladder, Stomach and *Sanjiao*. Furthermore, each *yin* orb is paired with *yang* viscera. Thus, for example, the Heart is paired with the Small intestine, and they both are associated with fire in the five-phase (*wu xing* 五行) system. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese were not too concerned with the exact location of these organs. Rather than focusing on the anatomical features and structure, they paid attention to the ‘offices’ that each orb held in the body’s administration. Oftentimes these orbs appeared as residences of the gods.\[^{42}\] The harmonious function of these offices is realized by constant and enduring cooperation among them. When concord among them ceases diseases and disharmonies ensue.

**Jing 精**

_Jing_ is a more physical, denser form of _qi_. Originally meaning to “sort rice,” “to select,”

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\[^{41}\] Ute Engelhardt. _Opus cit._ 98
\[^{42}\] Ibid
“to refine,” it came in time to mean what is purest, i.e., “essence.” The first understanding of essence is as the reproductive energies of both male and female, i.e., semen in men. The other meaning is of the transformation of food and air into the material basis of physical growth and development. In classical Chinese medicine jing is conceived as qi in transition from one determinate form to another. Thus, jing is the qi that has been transformed naturally from primordial qi, Yuan Qi 元氣, the qi that we inherited from our parents. The jing nourishes the orbs and the whole body and is usually conceived as residing in, and the responsibility of, the kidneys. Jing transforms naturally from primordial qi and is stored in the Ocean of Qi (qihai 氣海; around the navel or lower abdomen). Jing is slowly expended from the body, by virtue of just living, which leads to the gradual decrease of primordial qi. The exhaustion of essence eventually leads to death, hence the emphasis of the Longevity Tradition, both medical and Daoist on preserving jing, that is reducing the loss of essence by consciously avoiding ejaculation in men, and replenishing the qi through the regular practice of qigong, meditation, and especially, avoiding excesses of every kind, such as emotional excesses, one of the fundamental reasons for the loss of health in Chinese Medical theory, and, in general, leading a balanced life.

Shen 神

The practice of qigong emphasizes the nourishing and refinement of various energies. The More refined these energies the more transparent the individual becomes, the more embodiment becomes a living experience. This is accomplished by constant work over the course of months and years, a lifetime in some instances, leading to higher and higher degrees

43 Ibid.
46 There are four types of qi: Yuan Qi, as mentioned in the text; Zong-qi, the pectoral qi, an essential qi in the body that is further divided into Ying-qi or nutrient qi, and wei-qi or defensive qi.
of subtleness of these energies. Thus, this process is conceived as nourishing the *jing*, transforming the *jing* into *qi* and then *qi* into *shen*.

Eventually this *jing* is purified and made more subtle and transformed into *qi* that then is moved consciously around the body in various cycles. This in turn is further rarified into *shen* (spirit), which is a third form *qi* assumes in the human body.47

The term *shen* is usually understood as “spirit”, but, as all of the concepts in Daosim and Chinese Medicine, it is not as simple as one might think. *Shen* resides in the body, and it describes human nature’s psychological and divine aspects.48 The *yin* viscera are said to store five “substances,” which are aspects of the *shen*. Thus *shen* plays its role as the body’s governing vitalities.49 Sivin quips that, since *shen* is a force acting in the body, “the fact remains that a force is not a substance.”50 *Shen*, then, is another aspect of *qi*, another dimension of the subtle energies at work and infusing the body. Thus, we have three aspects at play here: the body, the *qi* that fills it, and the *shen* that governs it. *Shen*, then, can be described as “an energetic constellation that ranks above *qi*; it represents the divine, unfathomable aspect of the person.”51

As Engelhardt points out, the longevity tradition and Daoism place great importance to the nourishing of the spirit (*yangshen*); she goes on to quote the Zhuangzi,

To be pure and unadulterated, at rest, one and unmov ing, relaxed and without intentional action [*wuwei*], just going along with the course of nature ---- this is the way of nourishing the spirit.52

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49 Nathan Sivin. *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China*. Center for Chinese Studies, The Universi
(January 1, 1987) 132
50 ibid
51 ibid
52 ibid
The Five Phases – *Wuxing* (五行)

Perhaps the earliest mention of the five phases was in a text named “Declaration at Kan,” that appears in the Book of Documents (*Shang Shu* 尚書). However, the connotation of this text is of moral qualities rather than physical traits. Sivin acknowledges that dating this early appearance is difficult and all we have to go on is the use of the term by *Sung tzu* in the same sense in circa 350 BCE. ⁵³ Later on these five categories will be linked to other aspects and qualities of nature, especially numerology and astrology, giving the philosophers an opportunity to project the fivefold combinations beyond the boundaries of moral qualities to the constituents of matter as well. ⁵⁴ Thus, by the first and second centuries B.C.E., what had begun as a simple set of ideas through thought experimentation and elaboration had solidified into a sophisticated and enduring synthesis. This synthesis of the five phases was the foundation of a “cosmological theory of monarchy, which justified the imperial political order as a reflection of the order of nature. In the process a sophisticated view of natural phenomena emerged.” ⁵⁵

These notions of the five phases or *wu xing* (五行) still pervade Daoist and Chinese Medical thought and worldview: “The theory of the Five Phases is an attempt to classify phenomena in terms of five quintessential processes, represented by the emblems Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water.” ⁵⁶ They have been erroneously translated or understood as ‘elements’ though they are not concepts of a static nature, but dynamic, fluid and cyclical.

The five phases then, represent a sequence of generative energies transforming in an energetic life cycle. Thus wood generates fire, and fire (that has burned wood) transforms into earth. From Earth we get Metal and from (molted) Metal, Water is generated. This chart should clarify the cycle.

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⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵ Ibid 72
⁵⁶ Ted Kaptchuk, opus cit. p606
3. The Five Phases

The negative or overcoming (the red arrows) aspect of the cycle works against the harmony within the body-mind system and is the cause of many ailments. In this deranged aspect, the orbs are ‘attacked’, as it were, instead of nourished, leading to imbalance and disease.

Regarding the cosmological aspects of qi expressed as the five phases Livia Kohn says,

Qi is at the root of everything that exists, whether natural or supernatural, human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate. It generally appears in the

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complementary forces yin and yang, which correspond to night and day, shadow and light, resting and moving, feminine and masculine, tiger and dragon, and so on. They cannot exist without one another but continuously engender and develop in mutual interaction, moving in cycles of days and seasons, of inner circulation and outer rhythm. They are further subdivided into categories of lesser and greater and associated with the Five Phases (wood, fire, earth, metal, water), symbolic representations of their developmental patterns. In this more complex form, the phases of qi are then set into a relationship with the key Organs of the human body, its senses, material constituents, psychological agents, and emotions. 58

The five phases, then must be understood and kept in mind as processes describing the characteristics of the elements they represent. Wood, for instance, describes the process of growth and flexibility, rather than a piece of wood in Nature. 59 In TCM circles some want to think of this phase as a more general concept of vegetation, rather than just wood, exemplifying the same characteristics. Each phase has a list of bodily and cosmic correspondences as well. Thus wood, corresponds to the liver/gallbladder, to the East, the color green, the green dragon, the negative emotion is anger, the season is spring etc. The chart below will give a better, more comprehensive view.

59 Nathan Sivin. Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China. Opus cit. 72
4. Five Phases Chart

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Finally we will discuss what is probably the best known concept that came from the Daoist tradition and that is part of colloquial English by now. Yin yang, just as qi and he five phases, the concept of yin and yang lies at the core of Daoism and Chinese medicine. This notion has been easy to understand and assimilate into not only English but many other languages. The idea that the whole universe can be viewed as the interplay of two dynamic, opposite yet complementary forces, is easy enough to see and understand with palpable, simple and direct examples from nature and life at any level of subtlety. Thus we have day and night, morning and evening, dark and light, heavy and light, male and female, big and small, etc. However, as the Chinese symbol for the interplay of these two forces describe (called T’ai chi, or Taiji), there is a tiny bit, the seed of yin in yang and yang in yin, as well.

5. Tai Chi 太極 symbol of Yin/Yang

The peak of one is the beginning of the other. When yin peaks, night for example, yang or morning begins to rise in an recurrent cycle.

The qi in yin and yang dynamic, then,

...moves in a steady alteration of yin and yang, two aspects of the continuous flow of creation: the rising and falling, growing and declining, warming and cooling, beginning and ending, expanding and contracting movements that pervade all life and nature. Yin and yang continuously alternate and change from one into the other. They do so in a steady rhythm of rising and falling, visible in nature in the rising and setting of the sun, the warming and cooling of the seasons, the growth and decline of living beings.  

Yin and yang pervades the Daoist tradition; it is one of the most ancient ideas informing its notions and worldview. Moreover, as it stands, it is one of the most widespread concepts adopted by the western world, as well.

**Literature Review**

When I began research on the subject of qigong and the Six Healing Sounds, I hit a wall much earlier than I ever imagined. To say that the literature on qigong and the Longevity tradition is scant would be an understatement. In his own review of the literature on qigong David Ownby says, “The scholarly literature on the major subjects ... qigong and Falun Gong, remains rather thin.” And, “Despite the importance of qigong to the history of Falun Gong, relatively little has been published on this rich and fascinating topic.” Livia Kohn, one of the most prolific scholars of Daoism and someone who has written and edited the few works dealing with the Longevity tradition says of the literature, “Placed at the intersection of fields, the longevity tradition has rarely been the subject of specialized studies. Only a few dedicated scholars, such as Sakade Yoshinobu, Catherine Despeux, Ute Engelhardt, and Vivienne Lo, have contributed significantly to its understanding, and there are only two edited volumes in English that deal specifically with it.”

These statements from Kohn and Ownby will give us an idea of the limited nature of the

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62 Livia Kohn. *Chinese Healing Exercises*. Opus cit. 3  
63 Ibid 10
material on *qigong*. I will attempt, then, to give a review on the current state of the literature on *qigong* and the six healing sounds, leaving some tangential subjects out of this review. Thus, bearing in mind the scant literature on the subject we can begin to address the authors that have contributed to the advancement of the discipline, and to this dissertation in particular.

The review begins by looking at the history and who has contributed most directly to the knowledge from that perspective. I separated the recent history from the ancient and medieval records on the longevity practices, and placed the recent history before the ancient. I did this because the recent history is closest to the actual events of the ethnographic experience. Dr Zhang is someone who lived through the events depicted in that chapter, and is an excellent representative of the major shifts in Chinese culture and the formation of the institutions of Traditional Chinese Medicine and *qigong*.

When dealing with the question, of what is *qigong* and where does it come from, the most surprising answer came from the excellent *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* work by David Palmer. Before stumbling on this book I really had no answer to the question of origins, a part from the usual and essentially, not very useful claim of it being a tradition bequeathed to a select number of schools and groups from ancient times. Anyone familiar with *qigong* and interested in expanding the knowledge on its nature and origins had come across the limited extant literature dealing with the question of ancient origins. However, no one could give an account of the tradition and especially the popularization it had gone through to become a mass movement in the 80’s and 90’s. In the words of Ownby, “there was no work in any language which would have permitted the anthropologist to situate his qigong group in history or in any other, larger context.”

Perhaps one of the most important notions the reader can take away from reading his work is the fact that *qigong*, as it has become known nowadays, is, in a very literal way, an invented tradition.

This work is truly enlightening. Palmer, a sociologist of religion, was able to piece together the events that led to the formation of Traditional Chinese Medicine and *qigong* from the beginnings of the new Communist regime i.e., 1949 onwards, and follow its evolution in the

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following decades. He put *qigong* in context, and elucidated, by combing through thousands of pages of “journalistic, biographical, autobiographical, and political accounts,” how *qigong* rose to prominence in a China that was trying to extricate itself from the old superstitions and propel the new country into a utopian future of prosperity and well being by the power of science and an overarching materialistic worldview. *Qi* was now the subject of scientific inquiry, and after experiments conducted by top Chinese scientists it was “proven” to have a material basis. The fact remained that the historical roots of *qigong* were more akin to religion and spirituality than to science, but the scientific view persisted, especially because it would justify to keep a type of religious expression, a “body-centered religiosity” as Palmer calls it, alive and in good graces with the often suspicious authorities.

Palmer affords us a landscape into *qigong* from a newly discovered perspective. It remains, to me, the most surprising finding while doing research for this dissertation. I rely heavily on Palmer’s book for this chapter.

David Ownby’s *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, a book wrote from a historical perspective, was also helpful in fleshing out the chapter on recent origins. As the title of his book suggests the emphasis of his book is on Falun Gong. However, since Falun Gong is also one of the many expressions of *qigong*, and as such rose to prominence with the *qigong* boom, he dedicates a whole chapter to the subject. Since Palmer’s book is the only work I am aware of to give an account at the macro level on *qigong*, Ownby also acknowledges and sings the praises of his watershed work and uses it to understand and develop his understanding of Falun Gong and subsequence fall out with the Chinese authorities.

More tangential to the dissertation but still useful, were the works of two anthropologists, Nancy Chen and Elisabeth Hsu who conducted research in reform era China. Elisabeth Hsu explored the subject of Traditional Chinese Medicine by studying three modes of transmission: the "secret", "personal" and "standard." She also studied with a *qigong* master. Nancy Chen explored the subject of *qigong* from the perspective of the body and how the body has the potential of becoming the locus of freedom from the iniquities suffered in the new culture of reform era China, especially medical reform. It also explores the so-called “*qigong* deviations,” that is, the negative effects that the practice of *qigong* can potentially have on
some individuals and how these pathologies were defined by mental health professionals.

The subject on ancient origins showed to have a few more scholars interested in the topic of longevity practices. The scholar that turned out to be a wellspring of works on the subject is Boston University professor emeritus Livia Kohn. She has singlehandedly edited the major books on the subject, aside from writing several original works. A review of all her books would take up another volume, to be sure. I will examine only the few that contributed most to this dissertation.

First, *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin*.\(^6\) This work addresses the origins of our modern version, i.e., *qigong*. It affords the reader a contextualized view of *qigong*, giving us, using several important works, in particular Donald Harper’s erudite examination of the medical manuscripts from Mawangdui tomb three unearthed in 1973, some detailed explanations of the *Daoyin tu*, the Daoyin chart, a description of the postures and the possible meanings of the captions. Kohn also places the whole tradition of Daoyin in the context of other developments relative to the longevity tradition. It examines *qigong* and, to a lesser extent Taiji, in today’s world and compares it to other similar disciplines and approaches to movement therapy, such as The Feldenkrais method, Thomas Hanna’s Somatic Education, the yoga tradition, breathing techniques, Energy Psychology, and Energy Healing. Kohn provides a very useful definition of fundamental Daoist and Longevity tradition notions, such as *Dao*, *qi*, the three treasures, yin and yang, etc. These are useful for the neophyte encountering the tradition for the first time since here he or she can find a plethora of information that will explain and clarify the basic terminology associated with Daoist practices.

Also edited by Kohn is the *Daoist Body Cultivation*,\(^6\) a collection of articles on similar Daoist subjects. It is in this volume that we find the only work dedicated exclusively to the six healing sounds of *qigong*, named here under its traditional rubric of “The Six Healing Breaths.” Catherine Despeux, another important scholar in the tradition of longevity practices, and, we might add, a student of Dr Zhang’s, writes this article. This is the main source for the chapter on the six healing sounds. Despeux is able to contextualize this *gongfa* (a version or incarnation of


qigong) and give a historical account of the origins of the six healing breaths, tracing its developments from its incipient rudiments in axial age China to modern times versions. This volume also features excellent articles on Yoga and Daoyin, by Livia Kohn, Taiji Quan (also Taichichuan) by Bede Bidlack and another on the state of qigong in America by Luois Komjathy, among others. These articles are enriching and a definitely positive addition to the scarce information we find on the subject.

Despeux has also written an article titled Gymnastics: The ancient Tradition. This very specialized and unique piece is found in another of Livia Kohn’s edited books, namely, Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques, an anthology of articles on the subject. Aside from Despeux’s article we find others that were extremely informative and useful in fleshing out this material. Articles by Isabelle Robinet on the tradition of Neidan, Inner Alchemy, Hidemi Ishida on the notions of body and mind, and the Chinese conception of self; and Kunio Miura’s The Revival of Qi, addresses how the Chinese understand qigong, the ideas old and new it represents and the conflict between religion and science in contemporary China.

The Daoism Handbook67, unsurprisingly, also edited by Kohn, is a compendium on articles dealing with several aspects of Daoism, rather than on longevity techniques as its central motif. It does, however, include Ute Engelhardt article on Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine, article that proved extremely useful in fleshing out the chapter on ancient origins and developments of qigong and Chinese Medicine. Also present in the first volume is the article on Neidan, or Inner Alchemy by Lowell Skar.

Regarding the experiential aspect of the dissertation, I did not attempt to taint the description of the experience with anything but a description of the events lived during the course. Thus, I do my best to ‘show’ the events witnessed and/or experienced without attempting to interpret them in any way. Here we take a phenomenological approach in which the ethnographer refrains from such temptation, which could, inevitably, distort the initial work he or she wishes to describe in a faithful manner. The showing will be, then, at the heart of this chapter, leaving the interpretation and theoretical approach for the chapter on liminality and embodiment.

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The section on Liminality comes from the use of Victor Turner’s idea of liminality. Although his work ended with his death in 1983, his work is very much relevant today. His treatment of the subject in his *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, as well as his *The Ritual Process*, and in particular the chapter on *Liminality and Communitas*, were instrumental in coming to an understanding of his development of anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep’s idea of liminality, and the application of that idea to the state elicited by the practice of *qigong*. His notion of liminality can be extrapolated into our subject matter, fitting elegantly into the concept of *ruijing*, 入靜 “entering stillness,” a term often used in *qigong*. Turner develops this idea from Van Gennep’s *rites de passage*, ideas he conceived from studying cultural rituals in which some individuals, at a predetermined point in their lives, go through a period of separation and isolation from their usual normal social interactions. Van Gennep characterized this period as consisting of three phases, namely, separation, a liminal period, and reaggregation, that is, a moment in which they are to become part of the social fabric of culture once again. The period in between is the liminal phase in which the personae is “invisible,” in the sense that he or she is “no longer classified and not yet classified.” For our purposes, then, we can take this notion and look at the *qigong* “state” as a very similar, oftentimes, but not necessarily, temporary condition. This, then, will be the jumping point from which we will discuss the notion of entering into a different ‘world,’ as it were, a state of mind or consciousness, that is ‘truly other.’ This state can be experienced as a light reverie or a deep trance. The important point to keep in mind is the nature of the state: the practice of *qigong* elicits this desired but natural state and by crossing the threshold, the liminal state, other qualities are manifested.

The ethnographic piece published in 1980 by Robert Fishman in an urban spiritualist organization in western New York was also useful in how using Victor Turner’s idea of liminality can be applied to a similar setting. The actual background was somewhat different, but the overall approach of a spiritualist ritual performed in order to bring about healing, and the

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subsequent mind or ‘spiritual’ states of what he calls “transmigration,” experienced by its participants, have definite parallels with the settings and experience of practicing qigong.

The culmination of the longevity and other Daoist practices is that of embodiment. Livia Kohn has also written extensively on the subject, although it is found more as part of the whole Longevity and other cultivation exercises milieu, rather than as a specialized subject matter. It is, nonetheless, a term that crops up regularly, for it is really the ultimate goal of Daoist cultivation exercises. The wisdom is lived and actualized in the body. The energies flow freely and are experienced in the body. We live as bodies. Qigong is, in a way, a body-centered religiosity, to use a term from David Palmer. It is a body technology leading to embodying the qualities of the Dao. Schipper, 71 has written extensively on different aspects of Daoism, and indirectly on the notion embodiment. By describing the diverse elements that go into the worldview and, by extension, bringing an understanding of how Daoist praxis is reflected in notions of inner landscapes, of the micro-cosmos of body being a reflection of the macrocosmic universe, of rhythms and how the sage follows the pulse of life in everything he does, quite naturally.

Robinet has also contributed immensely to knowledge of the Shangqing (上清) or Highest Clarity school, and affords us a clear view into the spiritual and embodied inner landscape, the gods or spirits that exist in the body or that are invited to dwell in it. Tao Hongjing, its founder, is one of the two presumed candidates that created or somehow systematized the six healing breaths, the other being another famous Daoist, Sun Simiao.

There is much more work to be done, to be sure. However, as the longevity practices become more entrenched in our culture and practiced by more and more people, we will see the growth of both practitioners and scholars attempting to shed more light into this ancient tradition.

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Chapter Outlines

The first chapter, the introduction, describes the purpose and goals of the dissertation. It discusses the elements involved in the origin and development of the questions, the questions themselves, and provides the basic notions of Daoism and TCM that will help the reader get a better understanding of the subject matter.

Chapter two will explore what we know so far about the ancient origins of qigong, better known then as the longevity tradition of Daoyin. It goes back to pre Han and Han times, and examines what scholars have gleaned from the discoveries at Mawangdui tombs in 1973. Here a chart depicting both men and women doing some kind of movements was found, and it is interpreted as being the oldest description of Daoyin exercises, and, most importantly the precursor of what we now know as qigong.

Chapter four will examine the tradition of the Six Healing Sounds, known then as the ‘Six Healing Breaths.’ In this chapter we are able to situate the tradition within the larger context the Longevity tradition. It also explains the different versions that were developed through time and clarifies which ones are still taught today.

Chapter three deals with the recent history of qigong. It explores briefly the events that led to the creation of qigong by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and subsequent actions taken by the government to foster further development of this old yet practical, effective, and inexpensive modality of medicine. Here we were explore the creation of a tradition, for Chinese Medicine was systematized into what we now call Traditional Chinese Medicine, but qigong, from the term onward, is clearly an invented tradition. Qigong, also showed many characteristics of a new religious movement, fact that contributed to its falling out of favor with the authorities. We end the chapter with a concise comment on the Falun Gong movement and its demise.

Chapter five will present the description of the initial inspiration for this dissertation. It is a simple report of the events that transpired during the qigong course that I and other students took in 1991, in Los Angeles, CA.
Chapter six is a theoretical exploration into the nature of the different states of consciousness oftentimes experienced during the practice of qigong as well the effects of healing and transformation. It delves into and develops Victor Turner’s concept of liminality as a way of viewing these various mind states. After this idea has been explored an established we move on to discussing the notion of embodiment as found in the different images and ideas within the tradition of Daoism and Longevity techniques. It begins by viewing the body as the locus of liminality, as a point of intersection of two worlds, and the practice of qigong as a body technology of the spirit. This liminal state is the threshold that, once passed, allows the person to embody a state of being that is transformative and also natural, in the Daoist sense of spontaneity and wholeness.

Chapter seven: Conclusion. I will conclude by drawing together the diverse threads examined in the previous chapters
CHAPTER 2
QIGONG: ANCIENT ORIGINS

As we have already seen, the term qigong is not only of recent origin, but a tradition purposefully and conscientiously, invented. Qigong is a term that, although used sparingly in the past, was chosen to denominate a new approach to ancient practices. It became, perhaps unwittingly, an umbrella term that was going to encompass a vast number of varying age-old Chinese energy cultivation techniques, ‘body technologies,’ and turn into, in post Mao China, a culture based on the suppressed impulse to any religious expression, in a way, a body centered religiosity.72

A good deal of what we now called qigong is, and the few scholars dedicated to the study of our subject seem to disagree, in general, that qigong as it is practiced today, is a close relative of the ancient Longevity practice of Daoyin.73 But qigong is not only daoyin. Many of the practices included under this modern rubric go well beyond its purview. It is a curious fact that under the ‘qigong’ header so many aspects of other ancient practices are incorporated in its vague definition that almost all of it could theoretically fall under the rubric “qigong”. And in a way it does. All one would have to do to qualify whatever discipline is performed by saying that one is practicing a ‘form’ of qigong, a gongfa, a denomination or “style,” as it is more commonly referred to; or, even more generally, a qi practice. Anyone somewhat acquainted with body technologies or our modern qigong, would understand what is meant by it; the reason for this lies in the fact that the praxis of qigong entails the basic and loose notions to all of them, a substratum without which there would be no such thing; they are: Dao, the ultimate reality from which everything in the universe comes, Shen 神 or spirit, qi 气, the five phases,

73 On this, the prolific Livia Kohn, one of the main scholars in this subject, says, Placed at the intersection of fields, the longevity tradition has rarely been the subject of specialized studies. Only a few dedicated scholars, such as Sakade Yoshinobu, Catherine Despeux, Ute Engelhardt, and Vivienne Lo, have contributed significantly to its understanding, and there are only two edited volumes in English that deal specifically with it (Kohn 1989c, 2006a). Livia Kohn, Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin. University of Hawaii Press; 1 edition (October 16, 2008): p10.
body, mind 意, as “mind-intent”, yin and yang, the universe, and microcosm, i.e., the body, and macrocosm, i.e., the world, circulation of qi. It would be safe to say that those are the core elements shared by just about any of the multifarious manifestations of Chinese body technologies and the shared Daoist practices in general.

Shamanic Roots 74

By and large, it would be safe to say that the origins of Chinese healing exercises, i.e., daoyin, appear to have their roots in shamanism. There were some legendary figures that straddled these two realms of magic and of health/healing promoting movements. On the one hand, their mystique was based on their shamanic powers; on the other they were associated with specific set of exercises already present in the Daoyin jing.

These personages come from the beginning of Chinese culture lost in the mist of fable and legend. Pengzu, the oldest figure in the mythology of ancient China, was a sage known as one of the masters of fire, but also associated with someone with powers over rain and wind. Chisongzi, Master Redpine, one of the immortals of the Han, was another of the early masters associated with daoyin. As Pengzu, he was also a master of the rain, a function fulfilled by most shamans in general. Thus, the Zhouli (Rites of the Zhou) says, “When there is a great drought in the realm, the chief shaman places himself at he the head of his host and calls for rain while performing special dances.” 75

Dancing, by its very nature, has a specially close connection with daoyin, in particular because of the understanding of the flow of energies, qualities of the elements as well as quantities affecting the macrocosm and the microcosm, represented by the human body. Thus, stagnation, and accumulation, broken or obstructed watery pathways, all indicate an unwelcomed over abundance of yin. Furthermore, when energies in the human body are

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74 This section is taken mostly from Catherine Despeux, Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition, in Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques. Center for Chinese studies, The Universi, 1989. 237-240

stagnated and congested, "the muscles and the bones are contracted and don't flex well. One therefore prescribes certain dances which guide the breath and ensures that it moves throughout the body in a harmonious fashion.\textsuperscript{76}

This prescription does not seem too different from the aims of \textit{daoyin} when explaining that the movements or modified dances, really, are a means of resolving the congestion and stagnation of vital energies in the body, a way of promoting the free flow of them the same way they help the free flow of rivers on the earth.

Another example of early associations with healing movements is the famous Pace(s) of \textit{Yu} 禹步. The mythical Emperor \textit{Yu} was the founder of the \textit{Xia} dynasty (late third early second millennium BCE, figure linked to saving vast areas of China from devastating floods of the Yellow River by engineering a system of dikes and channels through which to guide the waters, thus avoiding the continuing disasters the floods left in their wake. A key element of \textit{Yu}'s system also involved magic. In order for him to steer the waters or seek guidance he would perform his very particular dance, the famous Pace (or Paces) of \textit{Yu}, also known as the Bear Dance,\textsuperscript{77} and thus exert a measure of control over the few ways in which the waters could inflict damage over the areas in his charge. The Pace of \textit{Yu} is widely performed in Daoist rituals to this day. "In this dance the priest impersonates both \textit{Yu}, who paced the boundaries of the terrestrial world, and the celestial god \textit{Taiyi} (Supreme Unity) who paced the heavens."\textsuperscript{78}

There is also the connection between animal dances, a shamanic practice \textit{par excellence}, and some of the \textit{daoyin} movements most likely inspired by them. The crane is a symbol of longevity, the bear of power and healing. In Ancient China there were also other animal inspired dances, one of which was the dance of the twelve animals, believe to drive away demons and pestilence.\textsuperscript{79} In \textit{daoyin} we also find references to movements imitating animals: “Whoever can guide the breath like a dragon, pull it in and circulate it like the tiger, stretch like

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{77} Ibid 240
\item \textsuperscript{78} Shawn Eichman \textit{Taoism and the Arts of China}. University of California Press; 1 edition (November 6, 2000). 52
\item \textsuperscript{79} Catherine Despeux, \textit{Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition}, in \textit{Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques}. Center for Chinese Studies, The Universi (January 1, 1989) 240
\end{itemize}
the bear or swallow it like the tortoise, who moreover can fly like the swallow, coil like the snake, stretch like the bird...he will live a long life."\textsuperscript{80}

Daoyin certainly seems to have inherited several elements from shamanism, and at the same time, taken off in a different direction entirely. One of the reasons for this to happen is that the movements outside the purview of the shaman could be explored in different ways and systematized according to the experience of its practitioners. This way the could develop and expand in often unpredictable ways, and become closely allied to the more secular medical tradition.

6. The Pace of Yu \textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Baopuzi 15, in \textit{Ibid}.

Daoyin

Daoyin, a term which could be translated as “guiding and pulling,” and the “pulling” here means pulling out the old and “bad” qi from the channels, is the most ancient set of practices of which we have documented evidence. It is the oldest known form of ‘gymnastics’ found in ancient China, although the term ‘gymnastics’ has to be qualified. When we think of gymnastics in the west we usually think of people doing some vigorous exercise, sweating and, in general, exerting great effort in order to achieve physical fitness. In Daoyin, however, the notion of gymnastic differs considerably. On this point when describing the Mawangdui chart Livia Kohn says, “None seem to be engaged in vigorous movements, wide stances, or athletic poses.” There are movements, and there is breathing, but the movements are, with some exceptions, very gentle, “silk-like” and usually the breathing is either in sync with these movements or natural. By “in sync” it is usually meant that, following the notions of yin and yang, the natural observable pair of opposites that rule everything in the universe, inspiration and expiration are coordinated in such a way that they harmonize with them. Up (yang) and down (yin), or in and out are good examples of yin and yang. So for instance, when moving the arms upward, an expanding motion, it is time to inhale. When arms go down, a contracting motion, it is time to exhale, etc. Again, the movements are performed slowly and deliberately, the mind always guiding them. One could say that, in general, some variations notwithstanding, the movement without mind or yi, is not qigong, just like sitting or napping is not the same thing as ‘meditating’, although oftentimes they might look somewhat similar.

The oldest evidence we have of the Daoyin Tradition can be found in an assortment of Han-dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) manuscripts. Just as the modern version of qigong was born out of the medical tradition, it comes as no surprise that these ancient manuscripts are also found in medical as well as religious texts.

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83 Many qigong exercises can, others should, be practiced in a reclined or supine position. Some are performed while in bed, the same way that savasana or the dead pose in the Hatha yoga tradition, for example, is practiced lying down on one’s back, usually on the floor but not necessarily directly on it.
84 Livia Kohn, Chinese Healing Exercises: Opus cit. 10
For the lay person in ancient times, usually someone belonging to the elite, those that could afford to dedicate time and resources in acquiring the knowledge and time to practice, sought Daoist exercises as a way to maintain health and, hopefully extend it for as long as possible, hence the term *yangshen* 養生, nourishing and prolonging life, used to describe these techniques. Although not particularly Daoist in origins (the actual Daoist religion was not going to become an organized entity until the end of the Han period), longevity practices fed from different strands of practices en vogue at the time, to gradually become the so-called Daoist or longevity exercises. These practices have always been important to Daoist of all schools and medical practitioners alike.

We have evidence that by the fourth century BCE these techniques were already being explored as viable modes of extending life. The most famous oft-quoted reference can be found in the writings of Zhuangzi in the fourth century,

> To pant, to puff, to hail, to sip, to spit out the old breath and to draw in the new, practicing bear-hangings and bird stretchings, longevity is the only concern – such is the life favored by the scholar who practices gymnastics, the man who nourishes his body, who hopes to live to be as old as Pengzu, for more than eight hundred years.

Although Zhuangzi speaks of these techniques rather disparagingly, it gives us a good glimpse on their existence and their role as ongoing longevity practices of the times.

Evidence also exists of notions of the body and vital functions were being explored in philosophical writings of the time as well. By around the 300 BCE, early medical literature began taking shape and, much as it is today, the practices of nourishing life became an essential part of medical lore.

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85 Ibid
86 Ute Engelhardt. Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine in Daoism Handbook, Brill Academic Pub (June 1, 2000) 74
89 Ute Engelhardt, Opus Cit. 74
Longevity practices have grown alongside the medical tradition so we find an inextricable link between Daoyin and medical practice. This is understandable if we take into account the fact that the principles of nourishing life, yangsheng, and Chinese medicine are very much the same and have been since its incipience. Medical practitioners would use these techniques for health maintenance and/or health recovery aside from other forms of therapy. Under the Han these practices were taken up by the fang shi 方士 or ‘recipe masters’, a sort of intelligentsia of the times with a variety of specializations; these were “doctors, diviners and magicians,” some of whom specialized in medicine. They also incorporated the longevity techniques into their practice of divination and meditative techniques in search for the Dao.

From the third century BCE till the fourth or fifth century AD they were held a single type under the common rubric fang shi.

...During the flourishing days of the fang-shih, the Han and early Six Dynasties (second century B.C. to fourth century A.D.), fang-shih influence was significant in many areas of culture. Some people identified as fang-shih were deeply involved in scientific thinking and technological activities, especially in the applied areas of calendrics, metallurgy, meteorology, pharmacology, geography, and biology.

On the other hand the fang shi were carriers of the recipe literature, i.e., recipes, formulas, and skills of which the yi 医, medical doctors also participated. The fang or “recipe” aside from oral instruction more often than not based on the fang, became the norm, the way knowledge was transmitted. “To practice medicine”, Harper tells us, “is to practice recipes (wei fang 為方)... medical books are “recipe books” (fangshu 方書). The physician in search of knowledge finds it in these recipe books. That is how he learns medicine. Recipes and techniques, fangji 方技 (ji 技, meaning the standard word for skill in any endeavor), became

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91 Ute Engehlhardt, *Opus Cit.* 74
92 Kenneth J. DeWoskin *Opus cit.* 1
94 *Ibid*
the standard by which doctors using fang would learn, transmit and share knowledge with other medical practitioners. It will also be the way it connected their art to other specialists of natural philosophy and the occult.95

By the late Han period (Han Dynasty: 206 BC–220 AD) Daoism had began to emerge as an identifiable religious entity and longevity practices were not only incorporated into every Daoist school, but they refined and elaborated them, weaving them into their spiritual endeavors, reaching within this context, their apex. Chinese medicine also developed this tradition and they have had throughout the ages a fertile and invigorating exchange.96

There seems to be some kind of continuity in the general sense in which qigong or longevity practices have been practiced through the ages, albeit not in the way they are so massively popular today. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century only a select few were lucky enough or curious enough to engage in these refined and sophisticated body technologies, since the middle of the last century they have become extremely popular both in China and increasingly so in the west (just think of taiji becoming a household word in the same way as yoga or kungfu).97

Daoyin as part of the nourishing life tradition involves breathing, and performing deliberate, often silk-like movements in which the mind or yi 意 leads, guiding the qi 氣 and thus ensuring its patency all over the body-mind system. But Daoyin includes also sexual hygienic techniques, dietary recommendations, massages and “drugs”; the goal being largely to prevent the dispersion of qi and jing or essence, thus maintaining and replenishing the vital forces.98 The Huangdi neijing suwen (from now on referred to as the suwen) perhaps the primer of Chinese Medicine for the last two thousand years and datable to around the first century BC also counsels that these aspects of life are to be nourished and guarded, and a life of too much abandon could easily lead to premature illness and death. Thus it says,

95 ibid
96 Ute Engehlhardt, Opus Cit. 74
98 Ute Engehlhardt. Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine in Daoism Handbook, Brill Academic Pub (June 1, 2000) 74
These days, people have changed their way of life. They drink wine as though it were water, indulge excessively in destructive activities, drain their jing - the body's essence that is stored in the Kidneys - and deplete their qi. They do not know the secret of conserving their energy and vitality. Seeking emotional excitement and momentary pleasures, people disregard the natural rhythm of the universe. They fail to regulate their lifestyle and diet, and sleep improperly. So it is not surprising that they look old at fifty and die soon after.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the first step in achieving health and long life, according to these texts, is to avoid excesses that can, in due time, and most likely will, take a toll on the body. Aside from depicting these techniques, the texts, also counsel on sleep, hygiene, dietetics, activities and movements among other things, again with the view of, as the suwen also counsels, to avoid harmful excesses conducive to depletion of the vital forces.¹⁰¹ Both types of texts, that is, the Medical manuscripts found at Mawangdui as well as the Huangdi neijing, “belong to the preventive and therapeutic knowledge of early Chinese medicine.” Their connection is also documented by the fact that the daoyn tu is presented as part of a dietetic manuscript and another on the cauterization of conduits.¹⁰² In other words, these are texts dealing with variations on the same theme, keeping the underlying theoretical framework, as it were, intact, but approaching it from different angles: diet complementing cauterization or moxibustion, and attaining qi-harmony through gymnastic exercises.¹⁰³

As we can see the view of health involved keeping the body healthy, maintaining it so in order to achieve a long, happy and healthy lifespan. There are no other expectations other than that, unlike the Daoist counterpart who will take up these techniques not only to enhance health and maintain it, but as a requisite to achieve more mystical states of being. Yes, for the Daoists health is the number one prerequisite for immortality. For the layperson, however,

“exercises in this context are, therefore, very much a health practice that is not meant to lead to higher states or religious cultivation.”\textsuperscript{104} Moreover,

...In both religious and medical collections, [Longevity practices]...occupy a middle ground between healing and immortality and can be usefully applied on either level. They can be described as the culmination of healing and the foundation of immortality; they are the ultimate path to perfect health and the entryway to Daoist perfection.\textsuperscript{105}

**Early Medical Manuscripts**

We did not have much to go on in terms of manuscripts on longevity previous to the cache found at *Mawangdui* and *Zhangjia shan*. Before that the earliest references to longevity come from a Zhou (c 1045 – 256 BCE) bronze inscriptions in which the word shou 壽, longevity, is the most popular word when praying for blessings. Prayers of this kind would be directed to the ancestors but also to Heaven. “Longevity ... may be said to be one of the most ancient and universal worldly desires of the Chinese people.”\textsuperscript{106}

The term yangsheng, nourishing life, is first used in one of the *Zhuanzi’s* authentic chapters (4\textsuperscript{th} c. BCE), the same one we have already quoted above. The descriptions and ideas expounded here will be the subject of many other medical manuscripts from the Warring States (475 – 221 BCE) and Qin periods and in later texts, both medical and Daoist.\textsuperscript{107}

In December 1973 a cache of ancient manuscripts was found in tomb 3 at *Mawangdui* 馬王堆 near *Changsha* 長沙 in the province of *Hunan* 湖南 in south-central China. These were

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid: 10
\textsuperscript{107} Ute Engelhardt *Opus cit* 76
written on silk, bamboo strips and wood. They date for the most part to the early Han Dynasty, i.e., late second century B.C.E. At Mawangdui fifteen medical manuscripts were found, six of them dealing directly with yangsheng longevity techniques. These are primarily “recipe literature.” However, these medical manuals present the whole spectrum of longevity techniques and methods of qi-cultivation. It is worth noting that, these manuscripts have as their aim a long and healthy life and do not concern themselves with more ethereal and lofty pursuits such as philosophical speculation or immortality, or point to any idea of transcendence. Of course the notions of achieving immortality (xian) was very much present by this time in Chinese lore but longevity practices were there to promote health and long life in this world. The texts (Mawangdui and Zhanjia shan) “describe a kind of baseline macrobiotic hygiene for the elite that focuses on care of the body, not on the more philosophical and mystical programs of the ‘Neiye’ (Inner Cultivation) chapter of the Guanzi, Zhuangzi, or Laozi.” However, it must be noted that along with these texts many other manuscripts of natural as well as occult philosophy were found as part of the same cache and as part of the fang or “recipe” tradition en vogue from the early Han dynasty. Thus there was a strong connection between the Mawangdui medical texts related to yangsheng or other techniques, participated of the same milieu that considered all these disciplines as part of the same substance and line of inquiry, i.e., Daoyin literature and other aspects of natural philosophy and magic. In the Mawangdui medical manuscripts, “incantations and magico-religious operations were collected together with other medical recipes.” Those practices had, perhaps, belonged to the old shamans (wu) or were part of an oral tradition, but, by virtue of them being integrated into the books of specialists, the fang shi, they acquired a new prestige. The point to take away here is that Daoyin, medicine and magical practices were not as clear-cut disciplines as we would imagine them to be and, in the opinion of Harper,

108 Donald Harper, Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts, Opus cit. 4.
109 Ute Engelhardt, Opus cit. 86
110 Ibid 85
111 Donald Farper. Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts. Opus cit. 114
112 Ibid. Harper also adds that the development of the xian- cult of immortality in the third and second centuries BCE remain unclear.
113 Donald Harper, Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts. Opus cit 43
114 Ibid
physicians did not uniformly shun magic. However, by the same token, physicians in the Warring States times partook in the new way of learning, sharing and transmitting knowledge through a text-based tradition that separated them from the more marginal characters such as shamans both socially and intellectually.\footnote{Ibid} 

The \textit{Mawangdui} Manuscripts

Fifteen medical manuscripts were found in \textit{Mawangdui} 馬王堆 near \textit{Changsha} 長沙 in the province of \textit{Hunan} 湖南 in south-central China, in the tombs of three aristocrats, two male and one female. \textit{Li Cang} 利蒼, the Lord of \textit{Dai} is the one found in tomb 2. The other one was his son \textit{Li Xi} 利豨, a male of around thirty years old. Tomb 1 held the body of a female of around fifty years old, believed to be the Marchioness of \textit{Dai}, the local ruler’s wife. Apparently she died in the year 168 BCE. \footnote{Donald Harper. Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts. Opus cit. 14} The redaction, however, can be said to be of the third century BCE. \footnote{Ibid 4} 

Most manuscripts found were written on silk sheets; others were written on slips of bamboo or flat sticks of wood. Bamboo and wood were less expensive materials than silk and easier to work but silk would be easier to work on although it took considerable more skill. Silk also was easier to fold and store and would preserve contents better. Plus bamboo or wood had the potential of coming loose and get mixed up in an unrecognizable heap. \footnote{Livia Kohn, \textit{Chinese Healing Exercises}. 31. Also Harper. \textit{Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts} 18.}

What is interesting about this findings, however, is the insights that this recipe literature affords us into who was practicing what and how the elite was not only collecting this kind of material, the recipe literature, but we see how a whole tradition was taking shape. According to Harper, there were a total of thirty manuscripts found at \textit{Mawangdui} covering forty-five
separate texts that include maps, diagrams and pictures.\textsuperscript{119} One interesting find is two renderings of the Daodejing 道德經 by Laozi 老子 (Book of the Dao and Its Virtue). These two versions closely resemble the received version we are all familiar with, fact that assures us the presence of this classic to, at the very least, the second century BCE.\textsuperscript{120}

The texts from Mawangdui deal mostly with more technical medical questions such as the use of moxibustion or cautery\textsuperscript{121} on the eleven channels (mai 脈) and the diagnoses of their disharmonies.\textsuperscript{122} The fact that these texts discuss only eleven mai, term that Harper translates as “vessels,” but they are also mentioned in contemporary literature as channels, meridians or conduits, betrays an earlier, less elaborate theoretical development of the channel and diagnostic system, than the Huandi nei jing, the Chinese medicine primer that became prevalent later and that discusses twelve conduits in the body in which qi 氣 flows.\textsuperscript{123} Also noteworthy is the total absence of acupuncture therapy anywhere in the Mawangdui medical manuscripts. They only mention methods for diagnosing illness according to which vessels they affect and recommend moxibustion or cauterization therapy to cure ailments.\textsuperscript{124}

Two of the six texts dealing with yangsheng or longevity practices, the He yinyang 和陰陽, (Conjoining Yin and Yang) and the Tianxia zhi dao tan 天下至道談, (Discussion of the Perfect Way in All Under Heaven) have as its focus techniques of sexual cultivation. The Yangsheng fang 養生方 (Recipes for Nourishing Life) and the Shiwen 十問 (Ten Questions), although including sexual techniques they also afford advice on nourishing life through breathing techniques, diet and ‘drugs’. The Quegu shiqi 却榖食氣 (Eliminating Grains and Absorbing Qi) covers ways to do without grains and instead absorbing qi and using medicinal herbs as nourishment. In other words, this is a guide to fasting. The text repeatedly contrasts “those who eat qi” with “those who eat grain” and explains this in cosmological terms. Finally,

\textsuperscript{119} Donald Harper, Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts. Opus cit. 17
\textsuperscript{120} Livia Kohn, Chinese Healing Exercises. 31
\textsuperscript{121} Moxibustion: the burning of dried mugwort or Artemisia vulgaris—on points of the major vessels.
\textsuperscript{122} Ute Engelhardt Opus cit. 87
\textsuperscript{123} Donald Harper, Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts: Opus cit. 5
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid
we have the essential *Daoyin tu* (Exercise Chart). It contains forty-four color illustrations of human figures performing therapeutic exercises some with brief recognizable captions from earlier literature, such as the Bear Amble and Bird Stretch found in the *Zhuangzi*.  

The *Mawangdui* texts deal *in extenso* with sexual techniques, as Engelhardt points out a paragraph from the *Tianxia zhi dao tan*, and here is why:

> When a person is born there are two things that do not need to be learned: the first is to breathe and the second is to eat. Except for these two, there is nothing that is not the result of learning and habit. Thus, what assists life is eating; what injures life is lust. Therefore, the sage when conjoining male and female invariably possesses a model.

Thus eating and breathing are natural processes one is to perform in order to preserve and replenish one’s energies. But sexuality, although natural, cannot be allowed to turn into uncontrolled lust. This would only bring depletion of the vital forces. Sexual hygiene, then, is one of the most effective ways to keep and fortify the *jing* or essence; however, sexual desire must be kept under strict control in order to cultivate this fundamental vital force.  

Another interesting aspect of the *Mawangdui* texts is the lack of exploitation or one-sidedness between men and women, as in later texts, but rather presenting “a concept of mutuality between the sexes.”

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127 Ibid 87  
128 Ibid  
129 Ibid
The exercise chart is the oldest reference to “internal” exercises. Although the word calisthenics is sometimes used to describe these movements the word has to be, as well as the term gymnastics, qualified. Although in the times of ancient Greece gymnastics also had a spiritual component reflected in the old adage “Mens sana in corpore sano,” and played a fundamental role in the therapeutic medicine of Hippocrates as well as his later follower Galen, it was later on neglected in favor of its more competitive and aesthetic aspects. Daoyin, however, is a discipline of a different nature altogether. If someone watches a Taiji (by and large a form of qigong) practitioner perform the movements he or she will immediately note that this is a very different approach to movement and exercise. The movements are slow and deliberate, the mind becomes calm and the body centered and rooted, product of a right execution of fundamental principles.

130 Image from http://www.instituteofintegralqigongandtaichi.org/integral-energetics/. Open source
The chart found at Mawangdui, then, depicts,

...forty-four figures showing specific exercise poses. They are arranged in four horizontal rows with eleven figures each and are commonly counted from top right to bottom left. The figures average 9–12 centimeters (3.5–5 in.) in height, and each was originally accompanied by a caption naming or explaining the move. Both the images and the captions are fragmentary and have been partly restored—in some cases with arms, feet, and facial expressions added.132

However skillfully painted the figures may be, it is difficult to reconstruct the actual movements from static depictions and with so few of the captions with intelligible explanations; some of the more obscure descriptions are somewhat elucidated with the help of the Yinshu 引書 (Stretch Book), which offer a bit more information on them.133 Nonetheless, the Mawangdui manuscripts contain early, instructions and illustrations of how to regulate life energies to maintain health and vitality in the tradition of daoyin.134

One feature that comes jumps at the reader of the chart is the description of the “bear amble” one of the exercises described in the Zhuangzi passage mentioned earlier.135 This is an important point when it comes to placing the chart and at least some of the exercises in a historical timeline.

The chart, then, describes both men and women of different ages, wearing different kinds of clothes, some bear-chested, most fully clothed; their hairstyles represent the Han standard with their hair either tied up in various kinds of knots or covered with a cap.136 The figures are shown in different poses, some standing, four are kneeling or sitting. Two others seem to be in awkward-looking positions with knees slightly bent and arms extended—one “to stretch the neck” (#29), etc.137 There are many stances and what seems to be many different movements designed to move the qi in different ways through the bodily pathways or mai 脈.

132 Livia Kohn, Chinese Healing Exercises. opus cit. 36
133 Donald Harper, Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts: 132
134 Ibid
135 As a note, this is a movement still taught today and one that was taught by Dr Zhang with some variations depending on the qigong he was teaching.
136 Livia Kohn. Chinese Healing Exercises: 36
137 Ibid
Others, if the reconstruction is, indeed, accurate, resemble later styles. For example it is easy for someone familiar with the more traditional gongfa to recognize a couple of movements from the very popular Baduanjin qigong 八段錦氣功,\textsuperscript{138} usually translated as the Eight Pieces of Brocade. In particular figure MSII.C.4\textsuperscript{139} located fourth from the left on first row of the chart. This is the famous bow and arrow movement performed to stimulate the lung channel. Another example of the Baduanjin exercise is figure MSII.C.22, the eleventh figure from the left on the second row. This, Harper translates as “feverishness”, but adds that although the figure seems to be standing, little of the drawing remains. Nonetheless, if what is depicted on the chart is close to the real intention of the original drawing, it describes another exercise from the Baduanjin tradition, this time an exercise conventionally assumed to stimulate the spleen channel, although Harper ventures into saying that the feverishness might be referring to “feverishness of the heart”.\textsuperscript{140} Perhaps the chart describes an earlier precursor of other developments. As Livia Kohn suggests it is most likely that the chart is a guide to specific, individual movements rather than a sequence. Each movement then would have a prescribed condition or ailment to alleviate or cure.\textsuperscript{141} This begs the question, what conditions were this exercise supposed to alleviate or heal? Well, some mention “pain in the ribs, hams, neck, and knees as well as inguinal swelling, abdominal problems, deafness, fever, upper side blockages, internal heat, warm ailments, and muscle tension—reflecting the areas for which the exercises are most often used: locomotive and gastrointestinal problems.”\textsuperscript{142} Some of the images bear the names of animals: the bear, the crane and the monkey are mentioned. These most likely form part of an earlier version of the Five Animals’ Frolic, supposedly created by the famous Hua tou 華沱 (c. 140–208). But since we see them mentioned here it would be logical to assume that they antedate him by quite some time, especially if we consider the fact that some of these animal movements had their origins in ancient shamanic practices. The crane in

\textsuperscript{138} For an excellent reference to this qigong tradition see Stuart Alves Olson Qigong Teachings of a Taoist Immortal: The Eight Essential Exercises of Master Li Ching-yun, Healing Arts Press (November 1, 2011).
\textsuperscript{139} Donald Harper. Early Chinese Medical literature. Opus cit 310
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid: 313
\textsuperscript{141} Livia Kohn. Chinese Healing Exercises: 38
particular seems to have been a symbol of longevity from ancient times. Not only were the animal-like dances beneficial for the free circulation of vital energies but the symbolism of the crane, for example, went as far as signifying the conquering of death. Thus in due course it would be the crane that would become one of the most important images of the immortals. As we have already mentioned, the Five Animal Frolics, traditionally attributed to Hua Tou 華佗 (c. 140–208) is, of course, a major development of this idea/practice.

The Stretch(ing) Book

Two important manuscripts on healing practices were found in 1983 in tomb number 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 in Jiangling 江陵 district of Hubei 湖北 province. Dating from 186 B.C.E., the tomb contained two medical manuscripts written on bamboo slips. One of them is the Maishu 脈書 (Channel or Vessel Book). It consists of several texts containing lists of ailments and descriptions of eleven qi- channels. Interestingly enough this collection of texts is closely related to the Mawangdui medical texts dealing with channels, and it likewise includes a short statement on practices of nourishing life.

The other manuscript is the Yinshu 引書 (the Stretch Book). It begins with the description of a daily and seasonal health regimen, including hygiene, dietetics, regulation of sleep and movement, and optimal times for sexual intercourse. It is ascribed to Pengzu, a “paragon of longevity” in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C.E., and a famous immortal of antiquity that it is believed lived for more than eight hundred years and opens thus:

Spring: generate; summer: grow; fall: collect; winter: store—such is the way of Pengzu.

Spring days. After rising in the morning, pass water, wash and rinse, clean and click the teeth.

145 Ute Engelhardt Opus cit: 88.
Loosen the hair, stroll to the lower end of the hall to meet the purest of dew and receive the essence of Heaven, and drink one cup of water. These are the means to increase long life. Enter the chamber [for sex] between evening and late midnight [1 a.m.]. More would harm the qi.

Summer days. Wash the hair frequently, but bathe rarely. Do not rise late and eat many greens. After rising in the morning and passing water, wash and rinse the mouth, then clean the teeth. Loosen the hair, walk to the lower end of the hall and after a while drink a cup of water. Enter the chamber between evening and midnight. More would harm the qi.

Fall days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. As regards food and drink, let hunger or satiation be whatever the body desires. Enter the chamber however often the body finds it beneficial and comfortable—this is the way to greatest benefit.

Winter days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. The hands should be cold and the feet warm; the face cold and the body warm. Rise from sleep late; while lying down, stretch out straight. Enter the chamber between evening and early midnight [11 p.m.]. More would harm the qi.  

As the finding of these manuscripts in aristocratic tombs seems to indicate, these instructions were directed to an elite, male, audience. For men, there is an emphasis on sexual practices, ancestor Peng teaching to take good care of the penis since its “vapor” (let us read that as “qi”) is essential for long life, stating at some point that “longevity lies entirely on the penis”. Thus, daily exercises, breathing exercises, and diet serve to “secure the penis and nurture its essential vitality”.

The emphasis on advice for the aristocratic elite is also attested in that it is clearly explained that the diseases of the elite are quite different from the ones that the lower classes have to endure. The “person of the way” suffers from imbalances of qi, and is able to prevent them by practicing daoyin, whereas the poor laborer that has to toil ceaselessly is struck with different kinds of disharmonies, problems he or she cannot deal with because of their particular lot in life and the fact that they do not posses the knowledge to overcome them, such as healing movements, massages, sexual cultivation and breathing techniques.  

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147 Ibid 111
148 Ibid
149 Ibid
afforded by the manuscripts and taught by physicians imparted a knowledge that was intended for “those who ride in carriages and eat meat”.  

Lists of different exercises and massages follow the next section; some are of a preventive nature others more curative. The last section deals with etiology and prevention of diseases. The climate is listed as one of the major causes of qi disharmonies. Summer heat and dampness, wind, cold etc, are the main culprits here. But unchecked emotions and diet, as well as lifestyle in disagreement with the seasons also play an important role in the etiology of disease. The recommendations are of stretching exercises, and breathing patterns. These are performed in order to “pull” discomfort from various parts of the body. The yin and yang aspect of physical disharmonies is also manifested in the way the counsel is given: to heal yang type of problems one is to gaze upwards and bend backward while interlacing the fingers in front. For Yin type of problems the person should look downward bend forwards and interlace the fingers in the back.

The daoyin tu and the Yinshu seem to have few similarities, the gymnastic and breathing exercises in the Yinshu being of a more elaborated etiology, fact that points to a later development of these techniques. The text in general points to prevention and preservation of health and the evasion of disease through diet and hygiene in everyday life; in this respect it has more affinity with the ideas presented in the Huandi neijing and might be considered its precursor.

Principal Texts Through the Ages

We have established that in ancient times what we now call qigong was better known as daoyin, and that this practice has its origins lost in the dawn of Chinese culture and, in particular, of Chinese shamanic culture. The ancient shamans had already made their

150 Ibid.
151 Ute Engelhardt Opus cit: 88.
152 Livia Kohn, Chinese Healing Exercises: 43
153 Ute Engelhardt, Opus cit: 89
discoveries and found that the circulation of \textit{qi} had its correspondences in the macro/microcosm, the world with its changing climatic conditions as well as the geography, rivers, mountains, valleys, the wind and the sun and moon.

The ideas and teachings of \textit{daoyin}, then were elaborated and developed into different strands and versions, every practitioner adding a bit of his own experience to the tradition. Thus over the centuries we are left with references to their practices and of their insights.

We have already visited the \textit{Mawangdui} and \textit{Zhangjia Shan} texts, the earliest references in manuscript form we have to date. Now we will examine other references that were bequeathed to us by their practitioners.

The \textit{Huangdi neijing}, the Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor, dated to the first century CE and extant in three medieval recensions: the \textit{Suwen} or Basic Questions, the \textit{Lingshu} or Divine Pivot, and the \textit{Taisu} or Grand Basis.\textsuperscript{154} This classic primer teaches the height of the ideas of yin‐yang, fives phases and system of correspondences put forth in a text. Let us remember that to this day the \textit{Huangdi neijing}, the central medical classic, remains the main standard reference from which Traditional Chinese Medicine is taught. Thus, as it sums up the thinking of the times on medicine, it ties together the notions of cosmos and environment, body and emotions and the interconnectedness of these elements. It affords advice on physiological and pathological processes and their diagnosis and therapies.\textsuperscript{155} Of special interest to us lies in that it describes diet and exercises in addition to acupuncture, moxibustion and drugs. In the words of Engelhardt, the Suwen, “compared with the earlier medical manuscripts, the \textit{Huandi neijing}, reveals a more stringent system that describes the relationships between human beings and the cosmos in greater subtlety and with higher degree of abstraction.”\textsuperscript{156} “To follow the orderly pattern of yin and yang means life; to act against it means death... The sage does not treat those who are already ailing, he treats those who do not ail; he does not treat what is already chaotic, he treats what is not yet in chaos. (\textit{Suwen 2.3})”\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid
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The idea here is that a good physician, one versed in the old ideals of immortality and perfected sages of old, knows how human life is to be lived in accordance with the principles of the *Dao*, although his contemporaries have lost the way and do not posses the knowledge to cultivate life as did the ancestral sages. The ideal is to prevent disharmonies and disease by catching the earliest stages of the tendency to chaos. Thus, the physician can read the signs and symptoms of chaos in its germinating stages and take measures to stop its development. This approach was something exemplified in the practices and disciplines of both physicians and Daoists, those who could “read” *qi* in themselves as well as in their environment, remaining vigilant, constantly attuned to their own beings, inside and outside. The *Huangdi neiijing*, then, was a very influential text, its ideas shaping Daoism and Chinese Medicine as well as other currents that absorbed its tenets into their own doctrines.\(^{158}\)

**From Han to Tang**

Unlike the *Huangdi neiijing*, which dealt with the entire gamut of traditional medicine, later texts treated specific subjects within the tradition, and this is true for the longevity exercises tradition as well. Most of these works have been lost and survive only partially in fragments and citations. Aside from texts with short commentaries on the *Daoyin tu* and others unearthed in *Jianling*, in Hunan, and one text dealing more extensively with medicine from the Sui dynasty (581-618 C.E.), all the texts dealing with gymnastics have been transmitted in the Daoist Canon, which was edited in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE).\(^{159}\) The sources in the Daoist Canon treat the tradition of gymnastics as one of the several arts of nourishing life; there is only one text that deals exclusively with *Daoyin*.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{158}\) *Ibid*


\(^{160}\) *Ibid*
According to Despeux, in essence and outlook most of the later materials seem to stem from an original work of the Jin dynasty (fourth century) of which we only have fragmentary evidence. That original work is the *Yangsheng yaoji* 養生要集 (Compendium of Essentials on Nourishing Life).¹⁶¹ This work is attributed to the northern Chinese aristocrat and official *Zhang Zhan* 張湛 of the fourth century, and at one point held the post of imperial secretary under the Eastern Jin.¹⁶² Most of what we have on this text can be found in the *Ishimpo*, a Japanese collection of Chinese medical works dated to 984.¹⁶³ We have, however, the sections of the texts that were divided into ten:

1. Harboring Spirit
2. Loving Qi
3. Maintaining the Body
4. Practicing Exercises
5. Proper Language
6. Food and Drink
7. Bedchamber Arts
8. Rejecting Common Habits
9. Herbal Medicines
10. Taboos and Prohibitions ¹⁶⁴

Livia Kohn points to an interesting fact, and one that we have already alluded to but needs to be kept in mind when thinking of the people who used to benefit the most from these practices. She says:

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¹⁶¹ Ibid. The text is contained in chapter 32 of the tenth century Taoist collection *Yunji qiqian*, found in the Taosit Canon (DZ 1032, fasc. 677-702).
¹⁶² Ute Engelhardt. Opus cit. 90.
¹⁶³ Ibid. 91
¹⁶⁴ Livia Kohn. Chinese Healing Exercises: 65
He (Zhang Zhan) had the material cushion necessary to indulge his interest in medical learning and was well connected to officials and literati. The practices he mentions were probably well known and widely used at the time, and he may well have put together the Yangsheng yaoji to help his fellow aristocrats stay healthy and live moderately despite their riches and newly found leisure, thus using long-life practices predominantly for this-worldly advancement.165

However, the emphasis of this text was not only this-worldly advancement since it had also a strong spiritual component that went beyond that of the caring of the body alone, mainly exemplified by the instructions on daily habits and undertaking activities that were in harmony with the patterns of nature.166

Yangxing yanming lu 養性延命錄

*The Yangxing yanming lu 養性延命錄 (Record on Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life, DZ 838)*, is a Daoist collection of meditative, breathing, and physical practices and which also lists the titles of the ten sections; it is usually attributed to either *Tao Hongjing* or *Sun Simiao*, but recently dated to the mid seventh century or mid Tang (618–690 & 705–907).167 The text as found in the *Daozang*168 is divided into six sections: general principles, dietetics, various prohibitions, techniques of qi absorption for the healing of diseases,

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165 Ibid.
168 The *Daozang* (abbreviated DZ) is the "Taoist Canon". It consists of approximately 1,400 texts that were collected circa C.E. 400. Before then and for a few centuries, the core Daoist texts were the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. They were collected by Taoist monks of the period in an attempt to bring together all of the teachings of Taoism, including all the commentaries and expositions of the various masters from the original teachings found in the *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki.Daozang
massages and gymnastic exercises, and alchemical practices. The second and the last parts are not found in the other version also present in the *Daozang*. 169

The *Yangxing yanming lu* appears to be a compendium of excerpts taken from the *Yangsheng yao ji*. The author seems to have composed this text from fragments of this latter text leaving out what he considered superfluous or redundant. According to Despeux one could conclude that the author of the *Yangxing yangming lu* used the same sources as those used to put together the *Yangsheng yao ji*. “One third of the section on gymnastics and massages of the Yangxing Yangming lu consists of extracts from the *Yangsheng yaoji*. 170

**The Daoyin Jing**

The *Daoyin jing* is the only text in the Daoist canon that deals exclusively with physical practices. It is also the first systematization of the exercises and routines. Its full title is *Taiqing daoyin yangsheng jing* (Great Clarity Scripture on Healing Exercises and Nourishing Life, *DZ* 818); 171 This text appears twice in the *Daozang*, one contained in the eleventh-century encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* (Seven Tablets in a Cloudy Satchel, *DZ* 1032; ch. 34) and another found in the collection *Daoshu* (Pivot of the Dao, *DZ* 1017; ch. 28; trl. Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 2: 134–143). The other is found in the collection *Daoshu* by the Daoist master and inner alchemist *Zeng Zao* 曾造 (d. 1155). 172

The *Daoyin jing* contains many references to diverse schools of the Longevity tradition, referenced here by associating the exercises presented with, Master Redpine (*Chisongzi* 赤松子), the famous master of rain under the mythical farmer *Shennong* 神農, among others, all the way to the longevity masters *Pengzu* and *Daolin*. The latter one, writing in the early fourth century, allows us to date the *Daoyin jing* to no earlier than this century. This text deals with a

170 Ibid
171 Ibid 230
172 Livia Kohn. *Chinese Healing Exercises*: 98
variety of physical exercises that, as a matter of course, have as its aim the nourishing of the vital energies with the addition of exercises specifically designed to treat different illnesses.\textsuperscript{173}

It appears, nonetheless, that the text is a late compendium that summarizes and organizes several earlier materials. On the other hand, it seems possible that the text is a fragment of the *Yangsheng yaoji*, a text lost in the eighth century, after the rebellion of An Lushan.\textsuperscript{174}

Breathing is a major point of emphasis in the *Daoyin jing*, thus following the ancient tradition. More importantly to our present work, it not only lists all six healing breaths like the *Jin’gui lu* (*Shenxian shiqi jin’gui miaolu* 神仙食氣金櫃妙錄 Wondrous Record of the Golden Casket on the Spirit Immortals’ Practice of Eating Qi, *DZ* 836, 16a; abbr. *Jin’gui lu*)\textsuperscript{175}, but associates each of them with a particular organ and set of ailments, thus representing the system that has remained standard to the present day.\textsuperscript{176}

Writing about the presence of the *Daoyin jing* in the *Yangxing Yangminglun*, Stanley-Baxter says that in Chapter Five of this work deals with a series of exercises for the body called the Guiding and Pulling (*Daoyin*) and Massage (*Daoyin anmofa* 導引按摩), that is, the *Daoyin jing* 導引經, or Scripture on Guiding and Pulling, and is a work deserves a special mention.\textsuperscript{177}

**Dao Lin Lun**

The *Taiqing daolin shesheng lun* 太清道林攝生論 (Great Clarity Discourse on Protecting Life by Master Daolin; *DZ* 1427, fasc. 1055), hereafter called *Daolin lun*, is another text dealing with longevity practices contained in the Canon. It is a rather short text of only twenty four


\textsuperscript{174} ibid 230-231.

\textsuperscript{175} “The *Jin’gui lu* is ascribed to Master Jingli 京里 or Jinghei 京黑 who supposedly lived in the fourth century. The text may be a Tang compilation but in contents predates the Sui.” Livia Kohn, *Opus cit*, Chinese Healing Exercises. Footnote p73


\textsuperscript{177} Michael Stanley-Baker. *Cultivating Body, Cultivating Self*. 28
pages describing diverse prescriptions and prohibitions regarding lifestyle, diet and living accommodations. It will come as no surprise that his work also seems to borrow from other texts like the *Yangsheng Yaoji* and the *Yangxing Yamgming lun*. ¹⁷⁸

We have examined, then, the main textual traditions on longevity, and, since they are already well represented, I would like to turn now to the place that the Six Healing Sounds tradition holds within the context of the longevity practices.

CHAPTER 3
THE SIX HEALING BREATHS

There are many strands within the larger Daoyin tradition, all sharing most of the underlying principles and ideas as well as the many practical aspects, adding their own variation on a common theme, as it were. Breathing in the longevity practice tradition, as well as the more ambitious immortality practices, has always played a prominent, if not crucial, role, not unlike the practice of pranayama in the Indian Yoga tradition. Thus, when looking at the healing sounds tradition we find that several texts deal with the technique of breathing known as the “method of the six breaths” (liuqi fa 六氣法) or the “formula of the six characters” (liuzi jue 六字訣). We find that the basis of the practice stems from the six Chinese characters associated with the sounds. The old Six Healing Sounds aphorism says: “there is one way of breathing in but six ways of breathing out”. These are somewhat different from the more common patterns of breathing exercises. The six healing sounds tradition does not deal with patterns of inhaling and exhaling divided in times for each one of them, or indicate that holding the breath is necessary at any point during the exercises.

Qigong, as the word implies, means working with qi. However, there are several ways of doing this, and although the different longevity practices or qigong gongfa have as their aim health in the widest sense possible, they approach it somewhat differently. Taiji, for example, a very popular form of qigong has as its aim mostly moving the qi in he body. Stagnation of qi in Chinese medicine and by extension, qigong, view this as one of the main causes of disharmonies in health leading to different degrees of health challenges if not dealt with in a

179 Main source for this section: Catherine Despeux’s Chapter on the Six Healing Breaths in Daoist Body Cultivation: Traditional Models and Contemporary Practices. Three Pines Press; 1 edition (April 30, 2006). This is the only scholarly work in English, that I am aware of, that deals with this subject exclusively. 37-67.


181 Maspero offers a few interesting examples of how to use breathing, and especially the holding of the breath combined with guiding of qi, in healing certain conditions. See Henri Maspero Opus cit. 464n17 and 506.

182 Taiji chuan, is an Internal Martial Art. The emphasis of this practice was always on softness, correct body alignment leading to inner stability, a calm mind and free flow of qi. The way it is practiced nowadays is particularly more qigong-like than martial in its approach and techniques, although there certainly are still many that practice it as a martial art.
timely manner. Other forms of qigong aim at improving martial arts prowess by hardening the practitioner, thus making him or her immune, or at least more resistant to blows and other more extreme tests. Other forms of qigong, standing meditations, for example, help to increase the amount of qi circulating in the body with the subsequent effect on health and longevity. Most forms, however, do a mixture of all of this.

What do the six healing sounds do, then? If there is a qigong style that deals almost exclusively with this notion of renewal of vital energies, and particularly with the notion of cleansing, is the six healing sounds tradition. This is one of the major themes in qigong. When we breathe in we are taking in the new qi from the environment, the universe. When we breathe out, what we are breathing out is old and stale. So, the practice involves a conscious expelling of the old, impure qi from he body.

From Zhuangzi (Book of Zhuangzi) of the fourth century B.C.E., where we find the first mention of longevity practices, and specifically of breathing techniques, we see this idea of constant and necessary renewal expressed when it says: “To huff and puff, exhale and inhale, blow out the old and draw in the new,” (tugu naxin 吐故納新) This idea is particularly relevant when dealing with the six healing sounds since the whole idea of making these sounds is to cleanse the orbs or internal organs. One does this methodically, following a series of movements and meditations that prepare the body for a more deeply felt experience that also makes it more effective. The sequence also follows the cycle of creation in the five phases scheme of things (more on that later). This idea is articulated very clearly in a fragment of the Yangsheng yaoshi, 養生要集 (Essential Compendium on Nourishing Life), a medieval work that we already visited in the previous section. The text says:

Liu Jun’an says: Eating live qi and blowing out dead qi you can live long. That is to say, as you draw the qi in through the nose it is alive; as you blow it out through the mouth it is dead. Ordinary folk cannot absorb qi, since one must make constant efforts from morning to night and only then can one gradually extend the ingestion of qi. Without interruption one must draw it in through the nose and blow it out through the mouth. That is what we call “blowing out the old and drawing in the new.”

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The word *tu*, “to blow out” or to “spit,” points to breathing out through the mouth. According to Despeux, the practice may have some relation to an ancient exorcistic practice and the old art of whistling, used before the Han era to evoke the spirits of rain, wind, clouds, and thunder as well as demons and goblins. However, the notion of breath as life giving was not only obvious to the ancient Chinese but to all traditional cultures. We have already established the strong relationship between longevity practices and shamanism; shamans could use the breath in distinct manners, according to what the situation would call for. The breathing in of “soul” into a person’s body, the heart or the head or some other part, that has gone through a traumatic event in which the shaman was called to retrieve it is a patent example of a different application of the breath in healing, in this case the infusing of a soul, or part of it, back into someone’s body. The main point here is to establish the powerful connection that traditional cultures in general make between the breath and the notion of a subtle, ethereal energy or substance that can be either brought into the body as well as out of it. Moreover, the breath and the word that expresses it have almost without fail connected with the notion of a persons’ soul. A vivid example of this is the word of Sanskrit origin ‘atman,’ meaning both soul and breath. “In the magico-medical texts of the *Atharva Veda*, the magician, in order to bring back the soul of a dying man back to life “summons his breath from the Wind and his eye from the Sun, replaces his soul in his body, and frees the sufferer from the bonds of the death goddess Nirrti.” For the Chinese the connection between breath and life is not less strong.

All beings and all things are made of Breaths, more or less pure: ‘the nine Breaths coagulated mysteriously and completed the pattern of the nine heavens, the sun, the moon, the planets and the shining stars’. Among the beings, the gods were formed first from the knitting of Breaths. Just as, in

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185 Ibid

186 For a contemporary version of this ancient practice see Sandra Ingerman. *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self Through Shamanic Practice*. Harper San Francisco; 1st edition (September 27, 1991)

the world, breaths are transformed into spirits (shen), so in man Breaths are transformed into spirits which are within the body. Breaths, which are the substance of all being, are what give life to all beings.”

Moreover, “The entrance of Breath into the body is Life; the departure of the Spirit from the external form is Death.” In Chinese, of course this connection is of the word qi with breath (qi 氣 means literally, air or breath). The expelling of harmful energies through the out breath is a major theme in the six healing sounds practice. The “huff and puff” that Zhuangzi describes is chuixu 吹呡 and both these words are found among the six healing breaths, which explain a hot and cold breath, one with open the other with closed mouth. Huxi, on the other hand is the Chinese word for breathing and begins with the exhalation or yang aspect of breathing. “Hu” is another one of the six healing sounds, the sound traditionally associated with the spleen.

The expelling of stale qi also takes other forms. The sounds are associated with other harmful or unhealthy conditions in the body such as hot and cold for example. Some texts associate xu with a breath that warms the body, whereas the sound chui is a breathing sound used for cooling. Moreover, the later Han commentator Heshang gong 河上公 or Master on the River (...) states that “xu recreates warmth, chui recovers cool”. This early notion of sounds associated with hot and cold is corroborated in other texts as well, although the sounds associated with hot and cold may vary in time, the idea of correspondences remains.

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The Six Healing Breaths

So, what are the six healing breaths? As we have seen the six breaths follow the ancient vision of “blowing out the old and drawing in the new.” The technique calls for breathing in through the nose and exhaling through the mouth while performing the sounds. Each breath is associated with a particular character, defined in some detail in ancient dictionaries, notably the *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Annotated Character Explanation) of the Han dynasty and the *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典 (*Kangxi Dictionary*) of the eighteenth century.\(^{191}\) They are:

1. *Si* 口四 is a gentle, relaxed exhalation that lets the breath escape between slightly opened lips. This is the lungs sound. If you are too cold or too hot, or too tired, you use the Si sound. It controls the skin, and abscesses; by doing this sound conditions related to these will be cured.

2. *He* (or *Ho*) 呵 or *xu* 吁 is a strong breath with open mouth that is accompanied by a guttural rasping through tightening of the throat at the base of the tongue. Also described as a hot breath, it may serve to expel burning or heat. This is the Heart sound. It expels heat, in particular heart heat from the body. The heart tends to get overheated and performing this sound alleviates conditions related to this. Also fever.

3. *Hu* 呼, the standard term for “exhale,” indicates a blowing out of breath with rounded lips. This is the spleen sound. For fever, distension of the belly, stomach and intestine.

4. *Xu* 嘘 is a gentle expulsion of breath. The mouth is wide open and the air is released from the bottom of the lungs. When placing a hand in front of the mouth, one gets a feeling of lukewarm air. This is the sound of the liver. The liver opens into the eyes, most problems with vision can be alleviated with this sound.

5. *Chui* 吹 indicates a sharp expulsion of air, with lips almost closed and the mouth barely open. It is a puffing out of air that creates the feeling of a cold draft. This is the kidney sound. It “rids the body of coldness.”

\(^{191}\) Ibid 40.
6. Xi 嘘 / 嘀 is traditionally the sound of sighing. It describes a soft exhalation with the mouth slightly open that comes deep from within the body. This is the sound traditionally associated with the triple burner. In Dr Zhang’s system it corresponds to the gall bladder. 192

Although all these sounds can be practiced to alleviate the different conditions associated with the organ the govern, the He sound of the heart seems to work as well in treating many of them without having to resort to practice all of them. 193

...The five viscera and the Three Burning Places (triple burner), cold, heat, extreme fatigue, bad breath and diseases, are all related to the heart...caring for all diseases through the ho (breath), all will be cured; it is not necessary (to employ all) the six breaths.” 194

The main use of the six breaths, then is to cure illnesses. They also alleviate minor problems such as bloating after a heavy meal, since the breath has been polluted by food, or overindulgence in alcohol (without it being a full on drunken stupor), for which the use of ho is recommended. 195 Thus, we see a consistent view that the six breaths are indeed designed to cleanse the body of whatever impurities it has either absorbed or produced.

The inhalation inhales the pure (air) and the exhalation exhales what is dirty. There is dirty (air) because it exits from the five viscera. Why do the five viscera have dirty air? On account of eating the five flavors. (Each of) the five flavors (corresponds) to one of the five viscera. The turbid breath of each viscera is all exhaled through the same mouth. 196

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193 The Sung Shan T’ai Wu Hsien-Sheng Chi Ching trl.Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 1: 25 also mentions this notion that there is no need to use all six breaths but that Ho will be perfectly sufficient since they are all connected to the heart. In Volume 2 by the same authors the (trl.) Lingjianzi 靈劍子 (Master of the Numinous Sword, DZ 570; 2:45-74) of the mid-Tang alludes to another substitution, this time, however it recommends using xu and chui since they rid the body of the main causes of disease.
195 Ibid 498-99
Another theme associated with the six breaths is the abstaining of eating “grains” or *quegu* in favor of “eating *qi*”. This practice is recommended in the *Quegu shiqi* 卻穀食氣 (Eliminating Grains and Absorbing *Qi*), a text was found in the same cache as the *Daojin tu* and excavated in 1973 at *Mawangdui*, as already seen in the previous section. This text constantly contrasts those who eat grains with “those who eat *qi*.”

Again the main theme seems to continue being the cleansing of the body’s internal organs and the ingestion or absorption of vital energies from the environment. This abstention from grains really means to avoid ordinary foodstuffs and ingesting medicinal herbs and *qi* through specific breathing techniques instead. The six breaths play an important role since they will help to rid the body of the stale, noxious *qi* accumulated in the body by the processing of food, which seems, in their view, to promote this condition. Moreover, this text repeatedly contrasts “those who eat *qi*” with “those who eat grain” and states: “Who eats *qi* should regularly exhale *xu* and *chui* whenever one lies down or gets up.”

Another early mention of these healing breaths appears in the *Yinshu* 引書 (Stretch Book), a text found among medical manuscripts at *Zhangjiashan* 張家山 (Hunan) in 1984 and dated to 186 B.C.E., text that we also visited in the previous section. The text includes over a hundred instructions and presents three major kinds of breathing exercises—inhaling the pure *qi* of Heaven and Earth; holding the breath; and exhaling with *chui*, *xu*, and *hu*.

So, as we can see, these are also precursors or partial practices of what was going to become later the six healing breaths. The *Daojin tu*, the Dao yin chart explored previously also has some figures depicting practitioners with open mouths in different postures. There are also captions next to some of the figures indicating what sound to make while in the posture. “Looking up and shouting”; “Monkey Bawling to pull internal hotness;” These are two of the three, the third one is #25, calling like a crane, but this last one is more speculative than based on the information provided by the chart.

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198 Harper 1998, 130
200 Ibid
201 Harper 1998 315
202 Ibid 313. Fn5
By the mid-Tang era the association of xu with heat was steadfastly established. At the same time a variant of this sound appears, he, also associated with heat.

Thus, the Taiqing diaoqi jing (Great Clarity Scripture on Harmonizing Qi, DZ 820) of the eighth century uses he, which it treats as synonymous with tu and describes as the blowing out of hot pathogenic energies. The text says:

> Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, always inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Inhaling you draw in the pure [qi], exhaling you expel the stale [qi]. It is stale because it comes from the five inner organs. Why is it that the five organs have stale qi? It is because of eating the five flavors. Each of the five flavors corresponds to one of the organs, and each organ’s stale qi is eliminated through the mouth. . . . In all cases when the inside of the mouth is dry and the inner skin of the jaws feels rough and without saliva, or again if there is pain in the throat and one is unable to eat, this indicates a condition of heat. To alleviate it, open the mouth wide and exhale with he. With each he, use the proper gate [nose] and window [mouth]. Repeat ten or twenty times. 203

Thus we clearly understand that the sound he and xu alleviate excess heat in the body as well as dryness. Sun Simiao's Qianjin yaofang (Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces), and dated to 652 also mentions the sound xu and it too states (rather surprisingly) that this is the name of the god that resides in the heart. Despeux speculates that since there were no god names even remotely linked to the six breaths, the six breaths may have been, at some distant point perhaps, related to the invocation of Daoist body divinities. Furthermore, she adds, this is also plausible because of the denial of such possibility:

> The ninth-century Huangting neiijing wuzang liufu buxie tu (Illustrated Manual on the Tonification and Dispersal of Qi in the Five Organs and Six Viscera According to the Inner Yellow Court Scripture, DZ 432), hereafter called Buxie tu says: “The six characters [for the six breaths] describe the qi of the inner organs. They are not the names of deities. Those who make use of the six breaths need to know that they are exclusively used for the expulsion of diseases and must not be confused with embryo respiration” (21b). 204

203 Catherine Despeux. *Six healing breaths.* 43. Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 1:74
204 Ibid
Aside from expelling noxious energies from the body, and specifically from the five viscera, there is the belief of aligning oneself with the rhythms of the Dao. Thus Sun Simiao in the Xiuzhen shishu advises seasonal breathing practice. The text says,

In spring, breathe xu for clear eyes and so wood can aid your liver.  
In summer, reach for he, so that heart and fire can be at peace.  
In fall, breathe si to stabilize and gather metal, keeping the lungs moist.  
For the kidneys, next, breathe chui and see your inner water calm.  
The Triple Heater needs your xi to expel all heat and troubles.  
In all four seasons take long breaths, so spleen can process food.  
And, of course, avoid exhaling noisily, not letting even your ears hear it.  
This practice is most excellent and will help preserve your divine elixir.  
(19.7a)²⁰⁵

This overview of the origins and substance of the six healing breaths affords us a clear view of the tradition. It is chiefly a medical practice geared towards restoring harmony and balance to the body that may have been brought about by several etiologies including the simple ingestion of food. It is, by all accounts an effective and simple way to deal with health issues. What it is not is a technique geared towards the attainment of spiritual states or immortality. Having said that, however, it is safe to say that practitioners with those lofty ideals as their aim also practiced the six healing breaths or any other daoyin exercises for the sole purpose of keeping the body healthy while pursuing those goals.

Master Daolin Method

The first model regarding the six healing sounds are found in Sun Simiao’s Qianjin yaofang under the heading “Longevity Methods of Master Daolin,” who has been identified as Daolin 道 林, and also as Zhi Dun 支盾 (314–366), one of the earliest aristocratic Buddhists in Chinese history and a popular figure among authors of long-life texts, such as the Yangsheng

yaoji and the Daoyin jing. Another text that presents Daolin’s methods appears in the Daoist Canon or Daozang and is entitled the Daolin shesheng lun 道林攝生論 (Discourse on Protecting Life by Master Daolin, DZ 1427), hereafter abbreviated Daolin lun, a short work of 24 pages that discusses the subject in similar terms but in a different order and in only six sections: prescriptions and prohibitions regarding life style, living quarters, and diet. It also summarizes massages, exercises, and breathing techniques. The date of this text, Despeux conjectures, is likely pre-Tang (618–907) since it is almost identical with passages in Sun Simiao’s work and associated with the Yangsheng yaoji. This dating is also buttressed by the fact that Master Daolin’s method is also summarized in the Zhubing yuanhou lun 諸病源侯論 (The Origins and Symptoms of Medical Disorders), a major medical encyclopedia put together by a group of imperially appointed physicians under the guidance of Chao Yuanfang 巢元方 in 610. Although the text mentions other modalities, the six healing breaths figure prominently in the chapter on the ailments of the five inner organs.

This budding system also appears in abbreviated form the Yangxing yanming lu 養性延命錄 (On Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life, DZ 838). This text is usually ascribed to either Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536) or Sun Simiao. It describes the six breaths in the section on “Ingesting Qi” thus:

Whenever circulating qi, inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth, drawing the breath softly in this is called the Breath of Eternity. There is one kind of in breath, and six kinds of out breath: The one kind of in breath is called xi 吸 (inhalation). As for the six kinds of out breath they are chui 吹 (blowing), hu 呼 (exhaling), xi 嘀 (sobbing), he 呵 (huffing), xu 嘘 (sighing), and xi 吸 (panting). They all expel the qi. Normal people’s breathing consists of one exhalation and one inhalation: this was the original breath-count. In order to perform the exhalations of the Breath of Eternity, when the weather is cold, you can blow, when warm you can exhale. To delay and cure illness, blow in order to expel heat, exhale in order to disperse wind, sob in order to dispel vexations, huff in order to cause qi to descend, sigh in order to disperse stagnation, pant in order to

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207 Ibid
208 Ibid
Illnesses of the heart: the heat or cold in the body are expelled by the two breaths - the *hu*-exhalation and the *xi*-inhalation. Illnesses of the lungs: fullness and distention in the chest and back, this is expelled by *xu*-sighing. Illness of the spleen: when traveling wind breezes about in the upper body and it gets itchy, sore and congested, *xi*-sobbing expels them. Illnesses of the liver: pain in the eyes, worry, anxiety and distress are expelled by *he*-huffing. In the above twelve kinds of method for attuning *qi*, always breathe in through the nose, and expel the breath from the mouth. One ought to make the sound of the breath following the words *chui hu xu he xi xi* (blow, exhale, sigh, huff, sob and pant) when exhaling. If a patient relies on these methods, he or she must completely perform them mindfully, with reverence and respect. There are none who aren’t cured, and these are the essential arts for curing illness and long life.²¹⁰

Lastly, the *Taishang Laojun yangsheng jue* (Lord Lao’s Formula on Nourishing Life, DZ 821) of the ninth century focuses on its more spiritual dimension.²¹¹ The importance of this text, aside from the above mentioned, lies in that it describes two different theories on how the six breaths relate to the inner organs. With a worldview that includes the micro and macrocosms it remarks that the Ocean of *Qi* or *qihai*, a vortex of gathering energy usually placed two-finger breadth below the navel, and both a major acupuncture point and a bodily locus of meditation, collects cosmic energy.²¹² Following its emphasis on the spiritual, the text ends with an exhortation to cultivate both spirit and *qi* in order to achieve the *Dao*.²¹³

This text also shows that in the ninth century two somewhat different systems of the six healing breaths were en vogue and the Daoists of the times used both to their advantage.


²¹⁰ Ibid 112

²¹¹ Catherine Despeux. *The Six healing Breaths*. 46

²¹² Ibid

These systems were Master Daolin’s Method and the second one presented in the next section. Moreover, all the texts that we have seen so far that describe Master Daolin’s method link the inner organs to the breaths thus:

If you suffer from a cold condition of the heart, exhale using *hu*. In case of heart heat, blow out *chui*. For ailments of the liver, the breath is *xu*; for those of the lungs, it is *he*. To cure problems of the spleen, exhale with the *xi* breath; for those of the kidneys, use *si*. (Qianjin yaofang 27). As we will have a chance to examine later, this is quite a different set of correspondences, especially compared with the modern version that Dr Zhang teaches, which resembles much more Master Ning’s system, at least when it comes to the sound/organ correspondences.

The text also gives advice as to the hours in which to practice since each organ is more/less active during certain periods of the twenty-four hour daily cycle. It also advices:

Before undertaking the method, it is furthermore best to first stretch and [mentally] guide the *qi* to the right and left [sides of the body] 360 times. The method serves to cure all four basic kinds of ailments: diseases caused by contaminations, restrictions due to cold, illnesses because of wind, and the toxic influxes of heat. 216

As people suffering from any of these ailments calm their spirits and harmonize their breath, they can be assured of a cure. Each of the five inner organs is subject to 81 diseases caused by cold, heat, wind, or *qi* [contamination]. That makes a total of 404 ailments. In each case, one must know the disease category as defined by the symptoms. (ch. 27). Sun also mentions a list of organ specific symptoms that can be treated with the use of the healing breaths. Thus, people with heart disharmonies will manifest in fear of fire in their dreams; this would be accompanied with the corresponding symbolism such as the color red, the color of the heart in this system. To rid the body of cold the person should exhale the *hu* breath in thirty repetitions, and when hot the *chui* breath fifty repetitions (see table below).

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215 Ibid
216 Ibid
217 Ibid
The table of correspondences and sounds or breaths to use for each symptom:

1. **Correspondences according to Master Daolin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Qi</th>
<th>Repetitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>heat/cold excess, dreams of fire, red batons, cold</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>30/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Wood (Vegetation)</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Melancholy, eye issues, color green in dreams, tigers, wolves</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>30/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Aches, yellow in dreams, toddlers, playing with dangers</td>
<td>Xi</td>
<td>30/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Swelling, dream of charming people, family members</td>
<td>Xu</td>
<td>30/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Cold excess, dream of terrifying animals, often black</td>
<td>Si</td>
<td>50/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Master Ning’s Method**

Master Ning 宁先生 is a semi-legendary immortal who, as read in the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Immortals’ Biographies, DZ 294) of the Han dynasty, lived in the era of the Yellow Emperor.²¹⁹

Medieval China saw the development of another model for the practice of the Six Healing Breaths. This time the correspondences change quite dramatically and we even see the addition of another “organ” to the mix, namely, a particularly Chinese notion called the *sanjiao* 三焦 or Triple Heater. This is an organ described in early texts that provides a connection

²¹⁸ Adapted from Ibid 48
²¹⁹ Ibid 50
between Heaven, the upper heater, Humanity, the middle heater and Earth or lower heater. They later developed into the thoracic, abdominal, and pelvic, i.e., the lungs, small intestine, and bladder.\footnote{Since this is a prominent element in this qigong system as well as a very much conceptually functioning “organ” in Traditional Chinese Medicine we must mention that this is a rather ethereal concept and one that is met with quite a deal of uncertainty; the exact nature of this organ “is not clear from the classical texts. ambiguity and dispute surround this organ.” Ted Kaptchuk. \textit{The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine}. Mcgraw-Hill; 2 edition. 2000. 151. Moreover Sivin reaffirms this ambiguity and confusion when he states that, concerning the different meanings of the word jiao, “I prefer to keep the issue open by making it clear that I do not understand the term.” Nathan Sivin. Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China (science, medicine, and technology in east asia). fn 13 p 125.} Initiating its function immediately after birth, the Triple Heater system serves to control the transport, utilization, and excretion of the body’s energies. The text that first introduces this notion of the Triple Heater or (sanjiao 三焦) into the healing breaths system is found in the \textit{Taiqing daoyin yangsheng jing} 太清導引養生經 (Great Clarity Scripture of Healing Exercises and Nourishing Life, DZ 818), hereafter abbreviated \textit{Daoyin jing}, a text we already visited in the previous section, and one that deals with a broad array of data on different Daoist schools of healing exercises. Although this text is not mentioned in bibliographies until 1145, it is based on earlier sources with many fragments and quotations found in Daoist and medical literature. It is speculated that the text may also be a fragment of the \textit{Yangsheng yaoji}, a text lost in the eighth century and one that may have reappeared again in the Song under the title \textit{Daoyin jing}.\footnote{Catherine Despeux. \textit{Gymnastics: The ancient Tradition}. In Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques. Center for Chinese Studies, The Universi (January 1, 1989) 229-230.} In addition to the aforementioned texts, there are several others that mention Master Ning’s system. They are: \textit{The Taishang laojun yangsheng jue; The Taiwu xiansheng fuqi fa} 太無先生服氣法 (Master Great Nonbeing’s Method of Qi-Absorption, DZ 824, also Yunji qiqian 59), probably of the late eighth century (Maspero 1981, 460-61, 507); the \textit{Huanzhen juefa} (DZ 828, also Yunji qiqian 60.14a-25b), a text of the mid-Tang (Maspero 1981, 461); and the \textit{Taixi biyao gejue} 胎息秘要歌訣 (Song and Formula of the Secret Essentials of Embryo Respiration, DZ 131, trl. Huang and Wurmbrand 1987, 1:43-48).\footnote{Catherine Despeux. \textit{The Six Healing Breaths}. Fn 20. p50.} All these texts discuss the absorption, circulation, and enhancement of qi as well as methods of visualization and the prominent embryo respiration.\footnote{Ibid} There is perhaps another text, the \textit{Xiu xi zhiguan zuo chan fayao} 修習止觀坐禅法.
要 (Essential Methods of Cultivating Concentration, Insight, and Absorption, T. 1915, 46.462-475) by Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), the founder of Tiantai Buddhism in China that also mentions the six healing breaths, although the date, originally thought to be the earliest known document to discuss the healing breaths, may in the end be a later insertion. This system is interesting in that it disagrees with the correspondences shown in Master Daolin’s Method, instead being almost identical with master Ning’s. The Daoyin jing, nonetheless, is important because it describes the six healing breaths and associates them with the inner organs and their respective disharmonies in a way that has become the standard to this day. Moreover, Master Ning’s describes, from a medical standpoint the manner in which disharmonies and imbalances of qi should be treated with the healing breaths as they relate to the inner orbs. “It follows the standard correspondence system of Chinese medicine, is both therapeutic and preventative, and can address a large number of different conditions.” Using the various versions of the list in the different Daoist texts we find the following symptoms for the breaths:

2. Table of Correspondences according to Master Ning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Correspondence</th>
<th>Symptoms and Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>dryness and roughness of mouth, blocked qi, pathogenic qi, heat, heart conditions, emotional states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Xu</td>
<td>teary, or red eyes, due to inflammation; liver and vision problems; qi rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>fast and hot qi, swelling of abdomen, blocked qi, dry lips, spleen conditions, arm and leg issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Si</td>
<td>temperature fluctuations, lung problems, abscesses, skin disharmonies, nasal obstructions, fatigue, exhaustion, oppression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidneys</td>
<td>Chui</td>
<td>back and joints feel cold, genital problems, deafness, ear conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heater</td>
<td>Xi</td>
<td>Every condition associated with the Triple Heater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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224 Ibid
226 Catherine Despeux. The Six Healing Breaths. Opus Cit. 51
227 Adapted from Ibid 52
As we can see this model differs quite considerably from Master Daolin’s. It definitely does not want to include the dreaming aspect of the diagnosis or manifestation of illness in favor of a much more rational approach. It also reduces, among other things, the heart sound to just the one, *HE*, instead of the two in the previous system. The importance of the heart breath cannot be understated in this system. Each of the breaths can cure diseases as related to each organ. However, it is not necessary to do all of the breaths in order to elicit healing, since...

...the five viscera, the Three Burning Spaces, cold, heat, extreme fatigue, bad breath, and diseases are all related to the heart; and since the heart controls (the) *ho* (breath), (thus) by caring for all diseases through the *ho* breath, all will be cured; it is not necessary (to employ all) of the breaths.

Although the sounds themselves have changed, and there is the addition of this other “organ” into the scheme of things, we see a continuation of the emphasis on the heart since both systems insist on it being a substitute of sorts for other sounds. Master Ning’s model of the six breaths, as we see it here, was later codified in various longevity collections and it has remained the standard to this day.229 It first emerged in the *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (Ten Works on the Cultivation of Perfection; DZ 263) of the year 1131, a wide-ranging collection in sixty scrolls of inner alchemical and body cultivation methods.230 It is interesting to note that here it is recommended to do the sounds after doing the very popular seated exercise sequence called the “Eight Brocades.”231 There are other texts as well, in which Master Ning’s system appears regularly and confirming its place as the standard system to this day.

**The Yellow Court Version**

In this version of the six breaths according to Master Ning’s model we find a very similar...
system of correspondences with those taught by Dr Zhang, namely, that the Triple Heater is replaced by the Gallbladder as a sixth organ, but keeps the same sound: $\text{xì}$. It also assigns dispersing (cooling) and tonifying (heating) properties to each of the breaths. This system seems to have come down to us from three Tang dynasty texts that go back to the early Highest Clarity Shangqing 上清 school of the fourth century. The Shangqing school was known for their extensive body visualizations and meditative focus of the five inner organs.\(^{232}\)

In these texts, however, the most effective method for affecting the state of the viscera concerns breathing. Thus to each organ corresponds a particular kind of breathing or "breath" that is, a precise way of exhaling a breath (described in detail in the "Method of the Six Breaths" section in the Huang-t'ing wu-tsang liu-fu pu-hsieh t'u) which "drains" the organ or a breath known as $\text{hsi}$ which strengthens everything.\(^{233}\)

The table charting these organs and correspondences looks like this:

3. Table 1 of Correspondences According to The Yellow Court Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qi</th>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Psych</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Lotus bud</td>
<td>Red bird</td>
<td>Sprit</td>
<td>Turmoil</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xu</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Hanging jug</td>
<td>Green dragon</td>
<td>Spirit soul</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>upside down bowl</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>Late Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chui</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Round rock</td>
<td>White deer</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xi</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
<td>Hanging jug</td>
<td>Turtle+snake</td>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td>Late winter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{233}\) Ibid 71
This system of other correspondences looks like this:

4. Table 2 of Correspondences According to The Yellow Court Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Orb</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Heat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood(Vegetation)</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td><em>Xu (as in shoe)</em></td>
<td><em>Chui</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td><em>He</em></td>
<td><em>Xu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td><em>Hu (hoo)</em></td>
<td><em>He</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td><em>Si (hissing)</em></td>
<td><em>Hu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Kidneys</td>
<td><em>Chui</em></td>
<td><em>Si</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Gall</td>
<td><em>Xi</em></td>
<td><em>Xu</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the system has increased in complexity by linking the organs to the five-phases dynamic. In a very medical fashion, the text involves not only the exhalation but takes into account the organ interaction as it is reflected in the entire scheme of the five phases. Although it also follows the circadian rhythms as defined in TCM, this system allows for practice at very much anytime beyond the yang hours of the day, i.e., 12 am – 12 pm (unlike Master Daolin’s method, for example, who recommended practice be done in the yang hours only).

The *buxie tu* (DZ 432) presents a more mystical view of the practice since it mentions in detail the inner organs plus the name an illustration of the resident body god in the form of a mythical animal. This is followed by the particular symptoms and recipes for effectively heal and maintain the organ’s health. The specific breath, healing exercise and diet are also provided.

The importance given to the five viscera by the Daoist and medical practitioners in general cannot be understated. Why the emphasis on these internal organs? Robinet, says regarding them,

> The viscera are very important throughout all of Chinese tradition,

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234 Adapted from Catherine Despeux. *The Six Healing Breaths in Taosit Body Cultivation*. Opus cit. 55
because they participate in the network of significations established by the theory of the Five Agents. To say that, traditionally, the viscera correspond with the Five Agents and, by extension, with the whole world, is also to say that they constitute the lines of force for the organization of the whole body as a structural totality. They are in this sense the symbolic points which connect microcosm with macrocosm, Man with Nature. All of these factors speak to the overall importance of the viscera. As the Huai-nan-tzu says, "The bladder is a cloud, the lungs are a breeze, and the liver, a wind; the kidneys are rain and the spleen, thunder; in this way Heaven and Earth make a triad with Man." This is why the "five viscera are the essence of man" and why, moreover, they should not be "dissipated to the outside."  

Moreover, Robinet quotes the Huang-t'ing wu-tsang liu-fu pu-hsieh t'u (Huangding wu zang liu fu buxie tu)

Heaven presides over Yang and nourishes man with five breaths; Earth presides over Yin and nourishes man with five flavors; the interaction of breaths and flavors establishes the five viscera. By spreading, the breath of the five viscera forms the four members, the sixteen sections, and the three hundred and sixty articulations; by stretching, it makes the tendons, veins, humors, blood and marrow; by condensing, it forms the six receptacles, the three heaters and twelve meridians; by circulating, it makes the nine orifices. This is why the five viscera are the governors of the body. If one of the viscera weakens, an illness appears; when the five viscera weaken, the spirits disappear. This is why the five viscera are the dwelling places of the luminous spirits, the hun and p'o souls, the will, and the essence (ching). Externally extended, they correspond to the five stars (planets) above and to the five mountain peaks below.  

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235 Isabelle Robinet. Taoist Meditation: The Mao-Shan Tradition of Great Purity (Suny Series, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions) 63
236 Ibid 65
5. Expanded table of correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qi</th>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Psych</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Lotus bud</td>
<td>Red bird</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Turmoil</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xu</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Hanging jug</td>
<td>Green dragon</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Inverted bowl</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>Late Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chui</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Round rock</td>
<td>White deer</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xi</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
<td>Hanging jug</td>
<td>Turtle+snake</td>
<td>bravery</td>
<td></td>
<td>Late winter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The texts also mention how the practice will strengthen the psychological aspects. It does this by cleansing the obstruction of the negative aspect with the different breaths and thus letting the positive virtue arise of its own accord. “The six breaths not only cure diseases but create a more humane awareness as practitioners visualize their gods and integrate the cosmic dimension of the organs into their personal identity”.

We can definitely see how the six healing breaths fits perfectly within the ‘qigong’ milieu, the longevity practices, being based on all its principles and emphasizing the cleansing aspect of the tradition, in order to preserve or restore health. He six healing breaths, stemming from ancient times, in which we find its precursors and rudimentary expressions in Zhuangzi, among others, was later developed into another full fledged ‘gongfa’, or style of its own.

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237 Adapted from Catherine Despeux. *The Six healing Breaths. Opus cit. 59*
238 Ibid
When I began writing for this dissertation I had focused on whatever little there is on the ancient “Longevity practices.” This has always been my main field of interest and I was getting a renewed impetus in my study of the subject as I discovered new authors and new works on the subject, although these were far from being a plethora, especially when compared to other fields of study. However, I had not taken the recent story of qigong too seriously mostly out of ignorance of the interesting twists and turns it had taken before becoming a force to be reckon with, especially considering the huge popularity it rose to in the 80’s and 90’s. After all, what else was there to know? Qigong, although a recent term, that much I knew, stemmed from traditions reaching the distant past, were recovered, as it were, “somehow,” during the second half of the last century and made popular both in China and in the west. But what happened with the qigong boom, is much more fascinating than I could have ever imagined. So, as it usually happens, while doing research I stumbled upon the excellent “Qigong Fever,” by David A. Palmer, a sociologist of religions, who now teaches at Hong Kong University. This book changed my perspective on an important aspect of the tradition that I think is indispensable to understand the origins of modern Chinese qigong, most significantly, if I wanted to make a worthy contribution to the field. Before Qigong Fever was written we, and most everyone else for that matter, really did not know much about how qigong came to be, especially considering the mass popularity it reached in the 80s and 90s. David Ownby puts it like this,

An anthropologist working with masters and practitioners in the field could do little more than repeat what his or her research subjects said about qigong’s origins; there was no work in any language which would have permitted the anthropologist to situate his qigong group in history

or in any other, larger context. David Palmer’s brilliant *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* changed all that.²⁴⁰

At a very fundamental level, because of Palmer’s book, we all have a better perspective of the recent history of qigong, an extraordinary new vista and insights regarding the creation of what was to become the qigong phenomenon in China shortly after the Second World War. Thus, most of this chapter on the origins of modern qigong is taken heavily from Palmer’s work. His account is in harmony with Chen’s assertion that, when she inquired about the origins of qigong, scholars told her that qigong was a “project sponsored by the Communist Party. The term qigong was a neologism, nonexistent before the 1950s.”²⁴¹

Although history in general is a soup of an almost infinite number of variables, all happening at the same time, and usually compounded by lack of reliable sources on the reality and accuracy of such events if one wants to document them, it sometimes happens that we can pinpoint certain events to a just a few smaller but decisive actions within that morass of developments. According to Palmer’s work we can identify a number of such facts with a good deal of dependability.

### The Invention of Qigong

The first surprising fact was that we could point to an actual person as perhaps the most influential personage in the creation of what we now call qigong. *Liu GuiZhen* (刘贵珍) is the “Man who invented qigong.”²⁴² Liu was a twenty seven year old clerk working for the local Communist administration in Southern Hebei, a ‘liberated area’, at the time (1947), when he was sent home on sick leave. He had been suffering for years from gastric ulcers, insomnia and

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‘neurasthenia’, conditions that had weakened him considerably. At less than eighty pounds in weight and expected to be soon dead\textsuperscript{243} he was sent back to his native village in Wei county. Back in his hometown he met a fifth generation master of the neiyanggong, or “Inner Cultivation Exercise” Buddhist tradition who happened to be his maternal uncle\textsuperscript{244}. This was Liu Duzhou. He taught him the exercises and meditations according to that tradition and, after about a hundred days of arduous, daily practice for hours on end, he recovered, having also regained about thirty pounds. It was not a complete recovery but his ulcer was healed and his other symptoms were greatly improved.\textsuperscript{245} Since he was all-better he decided to go back to work, fact that surprised Communist officials who had sent him home to die. They wanted to know how had he accomplished such an amazing feat and, and after Liu ardently told them about the qigong master and his more than three month daily regime, charged him with investigating and experimenting on the applications of the discipline. Once again, he was sent home to learn the method more thoroughly from his uncle. Because of this he was given an extra bag of rice, a real commodity in post-war, post revolution, China.

By now Liu had become a sixth generation holder of the neiyanggong tradition. He also had become a member of the Communist party. Because of his mastery of the discipline, his direct boss Huang Yueting now asked him to teach his methods to others and conduct experiments to determine its efficacy and applications. Of course, in the spirit of the times, the idea was to extract the method from “its religious and ‘superstitious’ setting”\textsuperscript{246} in order to bring qigong cultivation into the realm of science and rationality. His assignment was to “\textit{Extract Chinese body cultivation techniques from their ‘feudal’ and religious settings, to standardize them and put them in the service of the construction of a secular modern state.}”\textsuperscript{247}

To this effect the method was medicalized, as it were, and compared to some techniques described in classical medical texts.\textsuperscript{248} The important thing was to reformulate the method so it would not have any mystical overtones to it. Thus, for example, the mantra, an

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid p1
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid
\textsuperscript{245} David Palmer. \textit{Opus cit.} p 31
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid
\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Opus cit.} Q1—29
\textsuperscript{248} David Palmer, \textit{Opus cit} p31
important part of the practice, was changed from “The Claw of the Golden Dragon Sitting in Meditation in the Chan Chamber” to “I Practice Sitting Meditation for Better Health.”

The next challenge was what to name this method. Now, it is clear for anyone that has studied qigong for a while, that the term ‘qigong’ seemed to be an umbrella term encompassing a great number of sometimes very disparate practices, both in origins and content.

When Li Hongzhi, or any other qigong master, refers to the “ancient history” of qigong, he is referring to techniques and discourses associated with qigong and not to the term itself. True enough, the term qi has an ancient and noble lineage, in both the medical and philosophical traditions, and the term gong is no modern invention either, but the two characters taken together as a compound appear only occasionally over the course of Chinese history prior to the mid-twentieth century. The history of qigong as we now understand the concept can be traced quite clearly to the late 1940s and the activities of a small group of people.

Thus, Liu Guizhen and his colleagues were charged with the task of naming this old but now newly developed method. Some of the names thrown into the list of possibilities were ‘spiritual therapy’ (jingshenliaofa), ‘psychological therapy’ (xinli liaofa), and incantation therapy (zhuyou liaofa); of course, as we already know, they settled for the term ‘qigong therapy’ (qigong liaofa). Liu Guizhen has this to say regarding the new name:

The character ‘qi’ here means breath, and ‘gong’ means a constant exercise to regulate breath and posture; that is to say, what popular parlance calls to practice until one has mastery [you gongfu]; to use medical perspectives to organize and research this qigong method; and to use it for therapy and hygiene, while removing the superstitious dross of old; so it is thus called ‘qigong therapy’.

The idea was to combine those several and often-disparate methods under one general term that would include what he called the ‘triple discipline’ (santiao 三調), of body, breath and mind. All this had the underlying commitment to buttress the notion that qigong had a

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249 Ibid
251 *Opus cit.* Palmer p32
252 Ibid
scientific basis. “In China”, writes Nancy Chen, “qigong is linked to a wide spectrum of practices ranging from self-cultivation, meditation, medical healing, and breathing to martial arts, each with a specific history and genealogy.”

The selection of the term qigong was most definitely not readily accepted by a number of very knowledgeable people on the subject. The main objection they voiced was that, as Chen mentioned above, qigong was too general a term and did not describe accurately the diverse styles, lineages and background, and much less the often disparate practices that the term now included by association or by description. We will explore the names under which practices covered within the qigong realm in a different chapter. Chen Yingning, for example, underscored the distinction between his jinggong or quiet, sitting practice with natural breathing, and qigong which involved breathing techniques and working with qi. To him the use of term qigong had complicated things since a vast array of contrasting techniques, things like martial arts which used qi training to become more proficient at fighting, fore example, were lumped together with Taoist inner alchemy, and Buddhist meditations and visualizations. His jinggong, he averred, was “more effective, easier to learn, and involved fewer health risks from incorrect practice than qigong.”

Nonetheless, the plan to give these old techniques a new appellation went forward. Huang Yueting, director, of the Research Office of the Health Department of southern Hebei, proclaimed at an official meeting on March 3rd 1949 the “official adoption of the term qigong to describe the techniques studied for some years by the clinical team under his direction”. So, a few months prior to the founding of the People’s Republic of China “qigong” was born. Thus, we have Liu Duzhou teaching his techniques to Liu Guizhen and then refining by collecting and reformulating and hence, systematizing them into a ‘method’ that was in step with party ideology. Now the Party had a “modern instrument for the training and healing of bodies.” Body cultivation, then, had been transferred “from popular domain of superstition to the

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253 Nancy N. Chen, Opus cit. p6
254 David Palmer, Opus cit p40
255 Ibid. Palmer is citing Chen Yingning 2000: 371-83
257 David Palmer, Opus cit. p32
official and legitimate domain of health policy.”258

Qigong and Chinese Medicine

After decades of civil war the country was, in general, in a state of disarray. This included the medical system; so soon came the realization by the communist cadres of the impossibility of a massive overhaul of the medical institution in order to afford the public decent health care. The western or “scientific” trained doctors were no more than 12,000 in the whole of China, and could not provide for but a small percentage of the population. Moreover, they were almost without exception working in cities. This brought the numbers to one western doctor per every 26,000 people. On the other hand, traditional doctors were reckoned to be around 400,000.259 Traditional doctors were not only more numerous but, most notably, is the place that they had in the hearts of the soldiers and cadres that had suffered through the years of struggle during the revolution, and more often than not in rural areas, situation that had forced them to turn to traditional doctors to soothe their aches and pains; not only were they readily available but also were considerably more affordable and less dependent on institutional apparatus.260

At this juncture in time China simply could not afford to turn their back and refuse traditional doctors entry into the new nation based on the fact that they were viewed by some as backwards and unscientific. They were now to join the fray, were to integrate into China’s medical system and new modern policies regarding the health care system that now included them. At this point they could “unite and serve the people.”261 They had, nonetheless, to rhyme with the times and follow the Western model of a materialist science, forget their obscure superstitious traditions and work with western doctors to improve their technical abilities.

258 ibid
259 ibid p33
261 David Palmer. Opus cit. p33
Chinese medicine must study the scientific knowledge of Western medicine, and Western medicine must study the universal, popular spirit of Chinese medicine. . . In this joint effort, Western medicine must assume the principal responsibility to carry out research on Chinese medicine and thereby enhance its level of performance.  

The new cadres must have thought that traditional Chinese medicine was more than sheer superstitions, however, and that three thousand years of experience and time tested methods could not be dispensed with, no matter how antiquated or backward they may have seemed to some. The New China was to reform and cleanse them of their spurious ‘feudal’ origins and, with the help of the scientific, materialist view and methods bring age old Chinese traditions to new heights of development and, at the same time, place them at the service and the wellbeing of the people.

_Qigong Becomes a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) 1949 – 1965_

From 1949 to 1954 Chinese medicine came into the fold and recognition by the policy makers of the CCP. Traditional therapies had always been a jealously kept secret among families and practitioners but all that needed to change. The government set out to obtain old therapies from their usual secret transmission and old lineages, thus gaining access to age-old therapies that would become under state control; the acupuncturists and herbalists now became part of the modern health institutions set up by the new regime. Traditional doctors who had up until the period before the Communist takeover operated independently and privately were absorbed into the new system. _Qigong_ fortunes seemed to have increased in tandem with that of TCM practitioners, although it remained for the most part an unknown medical activity and developing slowly and behind closed doors, especially in southern Hubei. Moreover, the traditional doctors who had by default kept their secret formulas and experience

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262 David Ownby. _Opus cit_ p 52 Cited in Croizier, _Traditional Medicine in Modern China_, 160–161.
guarded for generations were now made to share them in Chinese medicine research societies.\textsuperscript{264} \textsuperscript{265}

Despite all the advancements experienced by the TCM community, they were still looked down upon by their western trained, biomedicine counterparts, and not given opportunities that western trained doctors had. Still they were made to work together under one roof in fifteen ‘unified’ clinics and hospitals in which both sides of the healing sector were incorporated.\textsuperscript{266} This policy of nationalization of the traditional medical profession was a palliative measure, which saw to make up for the lack of medical personnel as well as the low cost of traditional healing practices. This was to be a provisional measure since the idea was to have a truly scientific and integrated medicine take over some day in the near future.

We can safely say that in the early 1950s \textit{qigong} stayed within the confines of TCM. In 1955 \textit{Liu Guizhen} was invited to establish a \textit{qigong} center in \textit{Tangshan Worker’s Sanatorium} were ten rooms were allocated for this purpose. This was a very auspicious beginning and it turned that place into the “World’s first specialized institution”. Later it would grow to a one hundred-bed ward and patients that came here for \textit{qigong} treatments were to be reimbursed by the state.\textsuperscript{267} People coming from \textit{Beijing} and other surrounding areas and suffering from ‘neurasthenia’ and gastric disorders would stay and practice \textit{qigong} for seven hours a day. \textit{Liu Duzhou}, \textit{Liu Guizhen}’s teacher was also brought on board the program by having him in charge of teaching patients. Aside from those duties the “\textit{Tangshan center held five training and healing workshops for medical personnel from hospitals in the area}.”\textsuperscript{268}

Thus, the initial favor that western trained doctors had in the beginning of this movement was soon waning. Because, by virtue of their scientific training, they felt they should be let to their own devices, that is, work on technical issues rather than politics, they acted with a degree of independence that did not sit well with the established party. Also not helping their cause was the fact that by having had a western education, by either residing abroad or

\textsuperscript{264} Palmer, Opus cit p 34.
\textsuperscript{265} When I was a student of TCM we would usually hear stories from our Chinese classmates of how during the Mao era, some practitioners had to be seriously threatened to give up their secret herbal formulas and other secrets for the good of the country. Often times this, they told us, happened at gunpoint.
\textsuperscript{266} David Palmer, Opus cit p34
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid 34-35
attending missionary schools, they were somewhat tainted with the ideas and goals of the bourgeoisie rather than those of the new ideals embodied by the Chinese Communist Party.

In the summer of 1954 a prime example of the attitude that western trained doctors had towards their traditional colleagues came to light in an article published in the *People’s Daily* and later another one in the *Enlightenment Daily*, where they were found out to have admittedly criticized and ridiculed traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. This did not sit well with the establishment who thought that attitude was not only unscientific but it showed contempt for, and greatly insulted, the “medical heritage of the motherland”.  

As already mentioned, this arrogant attitude, was thought, came from the education they had received either in the United States or in missionary schools in China where they had, to a great extent, been corrupted with the attitude of the bourgeois culture represented by the west. With the waning of political or otherwise clout the western biomedicine community had hitherto had came during this period a rise in the fortunes of traditional medicine and with them that of qigong as well. Traditional Chinese medicine, on the other hand, had been brought into the fold of a modern revolutionary and respected institution, and as such, their practitioners felt nothing but gratitude towards the Party authorities. By the same token the party authorities felt it was easier to control a group that was somewhat dedicated to the cause and grateful for the newly encountered position in Chinese culture.

This downturn in fortunes for the Western trained doctors brought a good deal of expansion to Chinese medicine. In the apt words of David Palmer, “The ‘popular’ roots of the traditional medicine were emphasized; links with feudalism and Confucianism were played down. Traditional medical theory was standardized in a manner compatible with dialectical materialism.”

Between 1955 and 1958 we see a great institutional expansion of Chinese medicine, thus benefiting the expansion of qigong as well. Chinese medical colleges were established in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu, plus many other smaller venues.

In December 1955 *Liu Guizhen*, the “inventor” of qigong, continued his research and

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269 David Ownby. *Opus Cit.* p53  
270 David Palmer. *Opus cit* p36  
271 Ibid
added to his resume by being praised publicly by the National Ministry of Health in a story published in the *People’s Daily*, who congratulated him on a report of his research and activities he had presented to authorities in Beijing in the course of the previous and current year. “At the ceremony marking the Institute of Research in Chinese Medicine, Health Minister Li Dequan recognized and praised the work of the *Tangshan qigong* center;” The same year *Li Guizhen* was named an “All-China Advanced Worker” by *Mao Zedong* and consequently invited for personal interviews with high ranking officials. After all this success *Liu Guizhen* was charged with opening a second, even larger qigong sanatorium by the *Hebei* provincial Health Department. The site was going to be the prominent seaside resort of *Beidaihe* and given the status of an institution dedicated solely to the practice and treatment of qigong. This would be the chief qigong training and treatment institution in China until 1965. Several high party officials would attend political meetings in *Beidaihe* and, since they were there, be treated with qigong to alleviate the high level of stress that some of them suffered. Others, in other, if lesser a place in political clout, were also in a position to influence the destinies of qigong. This was the case of *Wang Juemin* a Party leader and the *Baoding* Municipal Party Secretary. *Liu Guizhen* had treated him for a leg injury that had become gangrenous and was threatening to spread to the rest of the body. However, after a few months of practice his leg had healed considerably. This convinced him of the power of qigong and became an avid promoter of qigong (and after that, who wouldn’t!). In a way just as *Liu* had healed with qigong, *Wang* became an ardent follower and practitioner of qigong and had his government colleagues come to him for counsel regarding such matters. It was this kind of political support that help qigong rise to new heights within medical institutions, and as many as seventy qigong units, including clinics and sanatoria, were founded by the end of the 1950s. Another qigong sanatorium, this time in Shanghai and consisting of eighty beds, was open, becoming a remarkable center were the *fangsonggong* or ‘Relaxation Qigong’ method was taught. This was created from the *Jiang Weiqiao*’s sitting meditation method, very popular as well, before 1949.

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272 David Palmer *Opus cit* p36
273 Ibid
274 Palmer citing Despeux in Despeux, Catherine. “*Le qigong, une expression de la modernite’ chinoise*” [Qigong: An expression of Chinese modernity]. In *En suivant la Voie Royale: Mélanges en hommage à L’éon*
Yet another “conversion” case was that of Chen Shou. He came from a wealthy family, had graduated from the missionary-run St John’s University after which he had joined the CCP propaganda work in the liberated areas. He had suffered an eye injury from an accidental discharge of his gun that left him with neurological damage. He began practicing qigong and taijiquan in 1955. It will be of no surprise that qigong did indeed help him recover from his injury, after which he decided to dedicate wholeheartedly to qigong work. He visited the Tangshan and Beidaihe sanatoria we mentioned earlier, sent cadres to study meditation with Taoist master Wu Zhiyuan in Mt Tiantai and then established the Shanghai sanatorium in 1957.

These events were to propel qigong at a greater scale. In 1957 Liu Guizhen published a book describing his neiyanggong method and between 1957 and 1965 several other books on qigong were published as well to great popular interest. These publications helped to spread the word regarding qigong. Qigong became a word now used widely and not confined solely to the units and small number of cadres dealing directly with qigong activities in general. Moreover, “Qigong was ...taught in several rehabilitation centers all over the country.”

Other masters were invited to partake in the qigong development. This was the case of Zhou Qianchuan (1908-1971), who published a book on qigong in which he demystifies the esoteric formulas of the Emei tradition,

In the past, [qigong] was practiced by few people, and had superstitious colouration; they used it to fool people and to attract disciples; at the same time, they usurped for themselves the jewel left in heritage by the forefathers of ancient times. Fathers did not transmit to sons, nor husbands to wives, but in a most conservative way used it as a tool to establish lineages and compete with other sects. As a result, this type of health-preserving and therapeutic medicine, which was compatible with scientific principles, buried its fine essence, and became clothed in superstitious garments, so that people came to perceive it
wrongly as empty mystical talk.\textsuperscript{278}

There are many other examples of \textit{qigong} masters of different styles and lineages contributing to the development of \textit{qigong}, but we get the idea. Other events less favorable to \textit{qigong} and traditional medicine, however, were looming in the horizon. What is important to know is that,

\begin{quote}
The foundation for the post–Cultural Revolution qigong movement was thus laid during the 1949–1965 period”, and that ... “it is important to underscore the fact that qigong, the larger category of cultivation techniques and theory to which \textit{Falun Gong} belongs, possessed, prior to the qigong craze of the 1980s and 1990s, a thoroughly orthodox, largely unproblematic history.\textsuperscript{279}
\end{quote}

\textit{Qigong} was viewed favorably during the post Cultural Revolution boom because it appealed to the new cadres sense of nationalistic pride. \textit{Qigong} was a force to be reckoned with, something that was scientific if stripped of its feudalistic and superstitious origins, and brought a deep sense of identity with the history of China. The threat of Westernization of traditional Chinese medical practices was also a reason to attach more import to Chinese medicine - and \textit{qigong} - thus counteracting that danger.\textsuperscript{280} Traditional Chinese medicine had popular roots. Most of the practitioners came from or were located in rural areas, was as widespread as one could imagine, serving the people on the ground and to a great level of efficiency, otherwise, how could an institution such as this survive at all? Also to take into account is the level of familiarity that the people would have had with such an institution and its representatives. The traditional Chinese doctor already mentioned more numerous by several tenfold than their western counterpart had been of real help for centuries by now. May be there was a trend, an ideology that beckoned the system to update itself through the use of scientific ideas, but can rest assured that the traditional Chinese doctor, manifested in various guises was here to stay. They had already served the people for a long time prior to the revolution and were now asked to do the same but organized under the new paradigms set out

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{278}David Palmer \textit{Opus cit} p39. He is citing Zhou Qianchuan 1961: 1-2
\item \textsuperscript{279}David Ownby. \textit{Opus cit} p54-55
\item \textsuperscript{280}Ibid p55
\end{itemize}
by the Party. The milieu of traditional Chinese medicine and that of qigong was not unfamiliar, albeit the latter had had its specialist and select few as their main personages before 1949. The boom that we will witness in the 80s and 90s was truly unprecedented in the history of China.

From 1955 to 1958 there was a large-scale organization of Chinese medicine, something that also benefitted the development of qigong. As we know, qigong had been confined to Chinese medicine, practiced by their practitioners and the people that received training on qigong were mostly of the same Chinese medicine background. Thus, we can ascertain with little degree of hesitation that qigong between 1949 and 1965 had been confined to the traditional medical institution. It was not a mass movement by any stretch, although it was certainly growing in popularity.

The Great Leap Forward

The Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong’s idea for revolutionizing the production and output of China’s agriculture and steel, among other things, had catastrophic effects for their people. Millions and millions died of starvation because of these policies, facts that are just now coming, rather gradually, to light. But what was catastrophic on one side was positive for qigong. During the Great Leap forward the Western trained physicians had an even worse turn in their fortunes due to their association with training and knowledge, the “denigration of expertise.” Thus, this period, from 1959 to 1961, witness the first wave of qigong peaking during the Great Leap Forward. Thus it would turn to traditional medicine and qigong for help in raising standards of health care in the country. Qigong at this time was praised for its contribution to the prevention of disease and therapy, The Shanghai Qigong Sanatorium been the recipient of a monetary award bestowed upon by the Health Ministry in 1959. Other

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281 For a more information on what went on during The Great Leap Forward see Frank Dikotter, Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962. It is estimated that the number of victims of the times ranges from eighteen to forty-two million.

282 David Ownby Opus cit p54
articles praising the benefits of qigong were published in this period. Qigong was certainly riding the waves of the high esteem in which Chinese medicine was held at the time.\footnote{David Palmer, Opus Cit: p41-42}

The Cultural Revolution and the Reversal of Fortune for Chinese Medicine and Qigong

But this was not to last. Just as qigong and traditional medicine had gone high up in praise during the Great Leap Forward, things now began to cool. The Great Leap Forward had been a disaster of enormous proportions with millions of Chinese left dead in its wake; now Mao Zedong got in a power struggle between him and the CCP. Qigong was caught in the middle of this. Political leaders were singled out and ridiculed for practicing qigong. Liu Shiaqi, as others as well during this period, was outright made examples of. One such case was Wang Juemin the municipal Part Secretary of Baoding. He was harshly criticized for practicing qigong, saying that it was unbecoming of a man in such position to be so wholeheartedly dedicated to such activity. But the criticisms did not stop there. In 1965 he was incarcerated, starved of food and water for a while, and made to do forced labor. After he got out he claimed to have survived all these ordeals because of qigong. So, the very same reasons for which he had been imprisoned, humiliated and tortured, were the ones that saved his life.

What was to follow was the infamous “Cultural Revolution" 無產階級文化大革命 (Wūchǎn jiējí Wénhuà Dàgémìng). This is not the place to expand on this terrible time in Chinese history, but let us premise what follows by saying what the Chinese call this period: “the ten years of going backward,” daotui de shinian 倒退的十年.\footnote{Volker Scheid. Chinese Medicine in Contemporary China: Plurality and Synthesis. Duke University Press Books (June 12, 2002) p 76} Mao began his campaign against his perceived political enemies with the cultural revolution. It soon got completely out of the leaders control and in the hands of Mao and only him. For qigong, however, the situation had been, up until 1965, one of support and cooperation coming from the Party leadership and Mao himself. After all, qigong had been an activity confined to, and benefitting
the Party cadres probably more than any other group. \textit{Qigong}, nonetheless had been a popular
movement welcomed by all those who came in contact with, who saw it as a boon bearing
nationalist connotations and contributing to the well being of the people. In the apt words of
David Ownby, “... from an ideological point of view, qigong, like Chinese medicine in general,
had until 1965 been seen as populist and nationalist, that is, more on the side of \textit{Mao} than on
that of his ‘enemies.’”\textsuperscript{285} In line with the new policies after 1965, no new literature was
published on the subject of \textit{qigong}. Let us point out that for ten years even the primary, middle
and high schools, and of course, formal education in the Chinese medicine colleges also were
shut down under the new ideology that said that the agricultural engineer, for example, had to
learn from the farmer. This extreme view of the learning process had, of course, to come at a
price for everyone.

Other criticisms were soon to follow. For example the New Physical Education magazine
came down harshly on \textit{qigong} bring up the abuse that quacks of the trade were perpetrating
abuses against \textit{qigong} practitioners, taking advantage of the clearly real healing powers of
\textit{qigong}. Also of distaste was emphasis placed on the age old ‘superstitious’ harmony and
tranquility elements of \textit{qigong}, concepts that were against the active training that China
policies had wanted to institute earlier in order to counteract the view of the ‘sick man of Asia’
slogan that the western powers had slapped on them from the very beginnings of their
interactions.

From then on “A storm of attacks on \textit{qigong} then flooded the press”\textsuperscript{286}. \textit{Qigong} was the
object of the old prejudices and usual accusations. They went somewhat farther this time
calling \textit{qigong} a “rotten relic of feudalism,” the “rubbish of history,” and absurd stories.”\textsuperscript{287} This
new wave of anti \textit{qigong} rhetoric came after its main figures as well. \textit{Liu Guizhen}, being at the
forefront of the \textit{qigong} movement was expelled from the Party, let go of his position at the
\textit{Beidaihe Sanatorium} “demoted seven ranks in the official hierarchy, and sent to the
\textit{Shanghaiguan} farm for reeducation.”\textsuperscript{288} And so, it went from bad to worse for many of the
people that had so greatly contributed to the rise of \textit{qigong} within the 1949 to 1964 years,

\textsuperscript{285} David Ownby. \textit{Opus cit} p55
\textsuperscript{286} David Palmer. \textit{Opus cit} p43
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid
period that corresponds to the first phase in the history of modern qigong.

Modern qigong, then, had been created by Liu Guizhen, by chance, really, and had developed into the organizational model and practice to be followed from then on and replicated in medical institutions all over China. This model was to “reconstitute itself,” after the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in what was to become the groundwork of the qigong boom to come in the 1980s and 1990s. Also notable is the fact that these body technologies were used as an instrument of state power. 289

The work of Liu Guizhen, aside from becoming the model to follow when it came to education and practice, had spurred a new mode of doing things, a way that broke with tradition and modernized several aspects of Chinese body technologies.

Conceptual references were reformulated. The effects of practice were described in physical and chemical terms, and concepts of yin—yang and qi were standardized and materialized as expressions of ‘primitive dialectics’ compatible with Marxist philosophy. The method of transmission was changed entirely. Useful therapeutic techniques were secularized and extracted from their traditional social and symbolic settings: master—disciple lineages were replaced by cohorts of ‘medical workers’ operating in institutional settings. Secret transmission was replaced by formal training courses. 290

And thus was qigong in the 1950s an ‘invention’, a modern interpretation based on the needs of the new regime for meaning separate from old religious and ‘superstitious’ narratives, so prevalent before the advent of the scientific, materialist mindset fostered in twentieth century China. Qigong had been invented not because it did not exist before 1949, but because the context and facets in which it had developed made it now a completely different venture. Qigong had its roots in Chinese popular culture and perceived as a completely Chinese ‘thing,’ far from any western ideology of any kind and especially far from the “specialist approach to science.” Very important too was the fact that it was easy to learn and affordable, needing nothing but a place and a teacher. No special equipment, garment, or props of any kind are needed to learn qigong. Mao had wanted, from very early on, to change the image of the Chinese as weak, that is, as the “sick man of Asia.” To this effect he had attacked the

289 Ibid
290 Ibid p44
predilection for sitting meditation (jingzuo) in favor of a more dynamic physical activity. This too had an effect on active qigong being favored in the early years over quiet meditation since qigong includes physical movements as well. This policy was in agreement with the ideal of a strong and healthy populace for obvious nationalistic reasons.\textsuperscript{291} No Culture or nation can prosper and develop, and much less thrive, if its population struggles with health issues, or the cost of health care puts a big hole in a national budget.

**Post Cultural Revolution: The Qigong Boom**

Whereas during the pre-Cultural Revolution this new ‘qigong’ had been a small-scale project, and very essential to keep in mind, a branch of institutionalized Chinese medicine, in which the cadres of the Party were the main beneficiaries of the qigong therapies, during the post Cultural Revolution we see qigong exploding to become not only a mass movement but also leaving the controlling hands of the government and being, for the most part, directed by their own practitioners. It became truly “the first genuine mass movement in the history of the People’s Republic.”\textsuperscript{292}

Qigong now is to take a completely different shape and form. Unlike its previous incarnation before the advent of the Cultural Revolution, the new movement is going to become known through its ‘stars.’ They were the charismatic figures, the qigong masters through which qigong would encounter enormous popularity. Sometime in the early to mid 1980s new social networks appear that would incite a series of activities fostering the practice and experience of qigong in different settings. The launch of networks of practitioners was accompanied by group practice in parks, lectures both national and international; sometimes these lectures would be healing sessions in which the audiences would be recipients of the healer’s qi. Whatever media was available at the times (Books, cassettes, videos etc.,) were also used to promote the practice “style” or gongfa associated with the teacher. These new

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid p45
\textsuperscript{292} David Ownby *Opus Cit.*, p56
teachers’ message was characterized first, by being taught publicly and delivered independently of the medical institutions in which it had been born and nourished during the early years, that is, between the 1950s, to mid 1960s. In the years after the Cultural Revolution, qigong, as well as Chinese medicine, was on the rise once more. By the early 1980s had teachers began teaching in parks to an increasing number of participants; during this time science had also made the discovery that qi in its exterior manifestation, had a material, measurable basis.

Guo Lin

Just as the invention of qigong can be traced back to a certain individual in history in the person of Liu Guizhen, we can trace the rebirth of qigong and first wave of the 1980s to one qigong enthusiast and master qi healer. Her name was Gui Lin. Born in 1909, in the Zhongshan vicinity in Guangdong she also had the good luck to have been taught body technology practices by a family member, a Taoist in Macau, place where the family had fled following the 1911 ousting of the last Qing emperor. An artist of the Lignan school by trade, she became an art teacher at several academies in Hong Kong and Shanghai. In 1949 she was diagnosed with uterine cancer and treated by performing a hysterectomy. Ten years later, when the first qigong wave was at its crest, the cancer came back. This time, though, she decided to brave her own treatment with the body technologies she had been taught as a young girl. Guo Lin has always been known in the qigong world for her particular approach to the five animal frolics, or five animal play. This was the style that she

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294 Guo Lin, Dr Zhang told me, was one his main teachers when he was young.  
295 David Palmer. Opus Cit. 47. This is such a well-known fact among qigong enthusiasts, but I will credit Palmer who explains this in a footnote. The five animal frolic wuqin xi, is a very popular and well known
used to rid herself of the malady. She studied the theories on qigong as well as both traditional Chinese and western medicine. After ten years of practice there was no trace of cancer. She had practiced and experimented with qigong and thus came to her own method based on breathing techniques. She had modified some body technologies, including Liu Guizhen’s, and created her own. With it she was going to teach others how to rid themselves of other cancers and health challenges. After some promising results from her teachings, she began teaching openly in Dongdan Park in 1971, that is, when the Cultural Revolution was in full swing. Many of her students recovered from the health problems they had. She adapted her method so different people could benefit from it. She also taught the principles and theories of qigong. At this time, it would be of no surprise to say that the Chinese authorities were not at all happy with Guo Lin’s activities. The old accusations of teaching ‘superstitious’ practices and fooling the people, were once more, thrown at her and subsequently made to quit her teaching at the Park. Undaunted, she simply moved her operations to another one. She had to do this a few more times over the next few years, suffering interrogations and harassment in the meantime. A couple of her students were arrested.\footnote{David Ownby. Opus Cit p58} In spite of all this opposition, the number of practitioners that came to her meetings grew and she began to train coaches that would be able to guide others in the practice at other parks as well. Out of this an informal organization took shape, one that would not only practice but would make her method better known to the public. Her persistence paid off and in 1975 she even managed to publish a mimeographed version of her methods, thus being able to reach a wider audience. Things would begin to turn around for her and for qigong as well, though. Some of her students were Party cadres had benefited from her qigong method and thus were able to pledge their support. In 1977, after Mao’s passing and a great sigh of relieve was tacitly felt, Guo Lin was offered a more permanent base for her activities at Beijing Normal University. This was a rather important step for qigong in general. From then on Guo Lin would submit a report on her healing activities on cancer for the last seven years and conduct regular classes at the university. The magazine Scientific World published an article in which she describes her method for training the mind and body to cure

\textit{qigong gongfa}, both in China and the west. Its creation is attributed to the almost mythical Han dynasty surgeon Hua Tuo and consists of movements that imitate the deer, the monkey, the crane, the bar and tiger. \footnote{David Ownby. Opus Cit p58}
To say that the Cultural Revolution had failed to eradicate qigong would be an understatement. Because of her undaunted persistence in teaching her methods under usual conditions of duress Guo Lin had managed to create the model that all the others coming after her would follow. The group practice in parks was a crucial component of this phenomenon, an event that would free the practice of qigong from the medical institutions in which it had been born and propel it to the public realm. Now the practice of qigong begins to explode into what is described as a mass grassroots movement. The method of teaching had changed substantially, from masters giving secret initiations or professional instruction at clinics “amateur enthusiasts led free collective practice sessions in public spaces.” Since now there was a book describing the method in detail, anyone was free to learn it and practice it anywhere. She had called her method the “New Qigong Therapy,” and as such it would spread not only in China, but also to some countries in the West. Her method, nonetheless, was not the only one being taught and practiced by now, and in the late 1970s parks were full with people practicing up to twelve different qigong styles in any given morning.

In this soup of history, however, several events, small and large are brewing in the background. Thus, roughly at the same time inquiries on the nature of qi, very significant scientists were researching its material basis. The country had survived the Cultural Revolution and the winds of freedom and scientific inquiry, as well as other national interests, were once more blowing in China. But science was at the forefront of this new wave.

The work of Gu Hansen was a watershed in the way qi and qigong were viewed. She had conducted experiment on qi and discovered that qi could indeed be explained in material terms. Her own account of the discovery:

I study electronics, which, originally, has nothing to do with qigong.

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297 David Palmer. Opus Cit p48
298 Ibid p48-49
299 Ibid p49
In more than 10 years of work at the Nuclear Research Institute I devoted myself mainly to the study of devices for the enhancement of micro-signals connected to nuclear electricity. At the end of 1977, by chance, I became acquainted with the therapeutic method of movement by qi. With my own eyes, I saw this therapeutic method—without medication, without needle, and without contact with the body of the patient—succeed in making a paraplegic, paralyzed in both legs, able to crouch and get up. This miraculous event opened up new horizons for me, to the extent that I could no longer remain still. I felt that I was at the entrance of a new domain: the science of life.\textsuperscript{300}

This discovery had major implications for the existence and fostering of qigong. With the proof that qi existed as a physical entity, made it a legitimate field of scientific inquiry that was now sanctioned by the government and pursued by other scientists in China as well. It was also in step with the political ideology of “dialectical materialism.”

China, coming out of the Cultural Revolution had adopted in 1977 the four modernizations as the new goals of the nation: Modernization of agriculture, of industry, of national defense, of science and technology. In 1978 along with those mentioned also came the “patriotic health movement” aimed at modernizing the sanitary and health level of the population. Chinese medicine was also in the minds of those who had called for improving the health of the people by launching its ‘accelerated development.’\textsuperscript{301} This of course, would touch on the development of qigong directly or indirectly. After all, qigong now had a scientific, material basis whose detractors could not easily contest. There had been experiments by the most reputable people and institutions in China claiming its existence. Unlike the experiments conducted in the 1950’s in which the emphasis was on the effects of qigong on different diseases, the post- Cultural Revolution scientists were focused on the external effects of the projection of qi. Most importantly, qigong had dislodged its position as an adjunct modality of Chinese Medicine to become its own science. Gu Hansen had proved the effects of qi on other bodies and thus legitimized it as an independent field of scientific inquiry. Qigong now was its own thing.

In July 1979, the Ministry of Health’s State Administration held a meeting on the state of

\textsuperscript{300} Translated in Ibid p 52-53
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid Opus Cit p59-60
Chinese Medicine, headed by Lu Bingkui, its director. The meeting was a call to review scientific reports on qigong and was attended by high ranking government officials as well as some 200 scientists and journalists. What transpired in this meeting was quite remarkable. Research papers on the nature of qi by Gu Hansen and other distinguished scientists were presented. Gao Wenshan, director of the cultural section of the political department of the navy, spoke describing his experience with Guo Lin’s in overcoming cancer. Martial arts or ‘hard qigong,’ feats were also shown. In this, the martial arts master broke stones with his fist and broke a steel bar with his head. Other qi demonstrations were performed, captivating the audience’s attention and giving rise to encouraging words by the Vice- Premier Fang Yi to continue qigong research. A few days later a follow up meeting took place, this time attended by 500 people. More demonstrations ensued and Tan Gaosheng of the China Academy of Science’s Institute of Mechanical Physics likened the repercussions of the discoveries in the field of qigong to those of Galileo.\(^{302}\)

The importance of these meetings cannot be overstated. These formed the basis under which qigong was going to take a prominent role within the scientific, and medical institutions all over the country. “These meetings were a historical turning point for qigong. By bringing together, under high political patronage, most of the main figures involved in qigong training, therapy and research, they gave birth to the ‘qigong sector’ (qigong jie)—a national network which included not only masters and practitioners, but also scientists.”\(^{303}\)

During the Cultural Revolution most institutions relating to qigong had been closed. These meetings, however, had infused the scientific, medical and political communities with a new impetus. It was also seen as a green light to develop and restore qigong to the rightful place it had before the 1966-1976 period. Since the health-enhancing properties of qigong were no longer in dispute efforts to rectify old wrongs should take place as soon as possible. Thus many of the old centers of qigong activities were reopened, this included the Beidaihe Qigong Sanatorium which opened its doors again in late October 1980; Liu Guizhen, the old qigong pioneer who had experience all kinds of iniquities during the Cultural Revolution, now

\(^{302}\) Ibid

\(^{303}\) Ibid., 31.
vindicated, was appointed as its director.\(^\text{304}\)

In the meantime *Guo Lin* kept teaching qigong at parks and other venues; a mainstream press had republished her book in 1980 thus making it available to the masses. People flocked to Beijing to study *qigong* with her in the hope to heal whatever malady was afflicting them. *Guo Lin* became something of a celebrity and had made qigong hugely popular as well. Several magazines published articles on her and her approach to *qigong*. And by the end of the same year “*Guo Lin qigong*” had spread all over China as well as other places like Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Japan and North America. \(^\text{305}\)

*Qigong* at this point deserved some official recognition. This happened when in 1979 the first state-sponsored qigong association was founded in Beijing and named the Beijing Qigong Research Society. This association became the intermediary between qigong masters, now found abundantly in China and the state. These masters offered their expertise in traditional body technologies and expressed their desire to teach this knowledge to the public. Thus many applications were received, and “...practice points for various methods appeared in almost all of Beijing parks”. Whoever could choose any method they wished, and the method’s requirement was to be beneficial and safe. Other associations sprang all over China and the *Zhejiang* Institute of Chinese Medicine launched a national qigong magazine in the fall of 1980. As mentioned before the qigong institutions that had been shut down during the Cultural Revolution were re-established.

**The Rise of the Grandmasters** \(^\text{306}\)

*Guo Lin* had paved the way for others to come and follow her lead. With qigong fairly legitimized and sanctioned by the government as an important asset of Chinese culture and history and, vindicated as a scientific field in its own right, to a great extent, but not completely, separate from Chinese medicine, qigong could now take off in what is going to be called

\(^{304}\) Ibid., 32
\(^{305}\) Ibid., 56
\(^{306}\) This section is taken mostly from David Palmer Opus cit Ch 3
“qigong fever,” qigong re, 氣功熱. This is the second wave of qigong. By 1981 the qigong ‘sector’ had taken a definite shape and it would remain the same until the crackdown on the Falungong movement in 1999 under Jiang Zemin and the end of the second, and so far last, qigong wave.

This milieu fostered the appearance of a number of new qigong masters. The next questions, then, are: where did these ‘qigong masters’ come from? How were they trained? Were they ‘real’ qigong masters? Qigong, now supported by several governmental agencies and its cadres, enjoyed the freedom to propagate its activities and gave rise to the space where qigong masters could rise to prominence under their aegis. These masters of what David Palmer calls ‘body technologies’ came from lineages they had become heir to or simply fabricated themselves. Although qigong still had its detractors (it was an easy target for the accusation of ‘mixin,’ superstition) it also had too strong a support from Party cadres, and some important personalities in the scientific community, so, for a while at least, it enjoyed a level of popularity that protected it from the dangers of suppression or over the top control.

Thus, around the mid eighties, in this environment of excitement and fascination for the revamping of old traditions, the magical enticement of not only healing and longevity but the acquisition of superhuman powers, and aided by the publication of magazines, the offering of lectures and healing activities, the number of qigong masters grew to staggering proportions. Ownby cites Wu Hao’s 1993 biographical directory, The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Qigong, which lists over 500 qigong masters, with associations with varying degrees in size and scale. 307 Mind you that these were the masters that had actually “signed up” through the association. In a personal communication Palmer conveyed to David Ownby that he thought the real number of qigong masters must have reached the tens of thousands who did not attempt to open their own schools. 308

At this point let us interject and add that there was one other very important factor that came to affect the popularity of qigong to an unprecedented scale. The Chinese have had a long history of magic and tales of magic, of masters, both Daoist and Buddhist, and folklore as well, that could fly in the air, cross walls, heal, where invincible in battle and were capable of

307 David Ownby, *Opus Cit.*, 65
308 Ibid., 256 ft 49
other extraordinary, ‘superhuman,’ feats. Qigong was at some point linked to the extraordinary powers, teyi gongneng. This was the more spectacular aspect of the qigong practice or, rather, the perception that the practice of qigong was directly, or somewhat responsible, for some of the feats a group of people could produce spontaneously, on command and, better yet, in front of audiences. Many cases were reported of people who could do extraordinary things. Thus, the whole extraordinary powers craze began in full tilt in Sichuan province in 1978 when a schoolboy claimed that he could read with his ears. A piece of paper rolled into a ball and with a character written on it would be placed in the ear of the boy and he would be able to tell, consistently and correctly, which character it was. The same result could be achieved if a sentence was written. To make a long story short, the news spread that there was a boy named Tang Yu with such extraordinary powers, and sooner rather than later the anecdote had become national news. Not only that, but the interest shown by Yang Chao, the Provincial party secretary who received the boy in person, seemed to encourage investigation into such phenomena. Thus the extraordinary powers ball got rolling.

Others heard of the feat and tried to imitate Tang. Many of them succeeded in gaining the same ability. Now the question was: is this something that can be trained? Is this a latent ability in all humans? According to one experiment in which ten ten-year old children were taught qigong-derived techniques such as breathing, relaxation, and verbal suggestion, six out of the ten acquired the same ability to recognize characters or illustrations without looking at them. Other factors went into the rise of the extraordinary powers phenomena as well, the media playing a major part in it, and the potential military applications, being just two of them; let us say that these powers and qigong became strongly linked and one of the traits of a ‘true’ qigong master would be to have and show any such superhuman abilities. And last but not least, the motivation of the public would be co-opted by the desire to acquire such abilities as well.

This played well in the context in which qigong was developing at the time. If we keep in mind that lineages and origins of one’s own pedigree as a master were easily fabricated and almost impossible to corroborate, the only ‘proof’ of being an authentic master was to be able

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309 David Palmer Opus cit., 64
to perform superhuman deeds. This was not all, nonetheless. A master had also to show high moral fiber, compassion and detachment from worldly desires. In the words of Palmer: “a master’s charisma was composed of four major ingredients: healing powers; virtue; initiation into a tradition; and a status as a person of science.”\textsuperscript{310}

Many of these masters had trained in the years of the Cultural Revolution, not in the institutions formed during the previous decades, but had done so in a covert, underground sort of way. It is hard to disagree with Ownby when he argues that fifty or sixty years are but a drop in the bucket, historically speaking, and traditions that have been in place for millennia are diehard in the hearts of a culture, and that Chinese scholars may have misjudged the divide between the traditional culture and the revolutionary mind of the times.\textsuperscript{311} Traditional body technologies were transmitted anyway, in underground lineages of martial arts, popular religion or family healing traditions.\textsuperscript{312} Thus, regarding this point, we must conclude that but a minority of masters had participated in the first wave of the \textit{qigong} movement, in the ‘invention’ of \textit{qigong} phase, in particular, in the medical \textit{qigong} institutions of the times. The rest remained more or less secretly doing what they had done from the beginning. This is in step with the previous argument by Palmer that in reality there must have existed tens of thousands of body technology masters that simply did not participate publicly in the new milieu. Still the numbers of \textit{qigong} masters that appeared in the mid eighties landscape was impressive. Apart from the fact that body technologies have been part and parcel of Chinese culture from its ancient beginnings, this phenomenon too has to be thought of in terms of proportions. In a country were the population has been counted in the hundreds of millions for some time now,\textsuperscript{313} can, at the very least, potentially, produce a staggering number of \textit{qigong} masters. Many of them claimed to have learned their body technologies in this underground way. On the other hand, those who ‘came out of the mountains’ (\textit{chushan 出山}), in the mid eighties had only recently learned their trade. That is the case of two of the most famous superstars to rise during that period, \textit{Yan Xin} and \textit{Li Hongzhi}. Moreover, “out of 223 masters

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{310} Ibid., 98
\item \textsuperscript{311} David Ownby \textit{Opus Cit.}, 65
\item \textsuperscript{312} David Palmer \textit{Opus Cit.}, 93
\item \textsuperscript{313} Population in China by 1950 was estimated to be over 500 million.
\end{itemize}

who mentioned the year of their first initiation to body technologies, half claimed to have begun in or after 1979, in the heat of the qigong wave. In summary, according to Palmer’s conclusion on this, the main source of most qigong masters’ training were popular traditions such as martial arts and traditional medicine, and this “at the margins of modern knowledge institutions.”

The Career of a Qigong Master

So who were these qigong masters? How did they rise to prominence? Qigong masters were usually and predominantly middle-aged men of no particular high social status. The group was comprised of engineers, schoolteachers, medical workers and technicians, and an almost total absence of university professors or high-level scientists. They also had to be registered in state-sponsored associations affiliated to state, medical, scientific and sports authorities.

What they taught was the method of the body, mind and breath, the ‘triple discipline’. But aside from that they also taught “an assortment of magical practices: healing by external qi, ‘spontaneous movements,’ information objects, cosmic language etc.”

The charisma of the grandmasters, relied mainly, but not only, on the possession of superhuman abilities, the extraordinary powers; this was the main criterion to prove the authenticity of the master’s knowledge and initiation into traditional body technologies. They had to show that the powers were real, and they did this through qi-emission séances, and lectures in which members of the audience would experience the power of the master, and most importantly healing or at least a major improvement of their ailments. Thus, these events would be a starting point from which the masters, with the help of his students and audience in general could cultivate an aura of power and mystique around him that would spread to the

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314 David Palmer. *Opus cit.*, 96
315 Ibid, 97
316 These could be any object infused with the energies and consciousness of the qigong master and can later be used for healing. There were ‘information tea,’ and ‘information paintings,’ objects, they claimed, could cure an array of illnesses, from myopia to cancer. See Palmer *Opus Cit.*, p160.
317 David Palmer. *Opus Cit.*, 86
public at large through these shaped networks and media as well. *Qigong*, to me, despite all its extrication from feudal and superstitious elements has always been a spiritual or religious practice, even though the practitioners in China, afraid of the repercussions of issuing such opinions, would deny it. *Qigong*, most definitely provided an outlet for religious expression in a culture where there was limited access to such activities. In the 1980s, when millions of people would flock to parks early in the morning to practice *qigong*, they were expressing this feeling; it was also clear that *qigong* had become “a legitimized outlet for the resurgence, reconfiguration and ‘modernization’ of religious beliefs and practices. The interplay and interpretations of these popular networks and official institutions gave form to the *qigong* sector.”

*Qigong* masters had to adhere to other criteria as well, such as his lifestyle. He (they were, for the most part, men) would heal the sick for free and lead a simple life thus proving his virtue. The issue of initiation was also a criterion for authenticity, hard as it would be to prove. But the aura of a master that has attained a high degree of development is due to him or her being the inheritor of a tradition that harkens back to ancient times and connects him with all the mythological and legendary figures of the primeval past. Thus, he is the living link between those archetypes and his disciples.

However, since now the milieu is of twentieth century China, that master is also a man of science. No longer can he only rely on the magical and mythical aspects of the practice, which, despite all the efforts to scientism, are still present, but he must be a man of science. *Qigong* is, after all, a science, and as such, he also partakes of this view.

These criteria, of course are an idealization for they were in it not only for the fame or the prestige. The reality was that the masters would charge sometimes exorbitant amounts of money for their services, from *qigong* lessons to healing to infusing objects with his *qi* for healing and other purposes.

There was always a tension, however, and a rather volatile truce between the scientific world and the realm of *qigong*. The situation of the *qigong* master is always precarious, no matter how popular or famous he would become. The accusation of superstition was never too

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318 Ibid
far from him; it could strike anytime. *Qigong* always had its detractors, who at the time were being kept at bay by the powerful figures that defended *qigong*, but by no means had they been totally routed. The charisma of the master was never enough, having to always cater to the connections he had with the official circles, on the one hand, and his relationships with the public, on the other.

**Famous Examples**

The *qigong* sector brought under the same roof masters of different backgrounds and lineages who, in the new milieu, could teach freely a large clientele of patients and followers. Whereas *Guo Lin* had taught the self-medication aspects of *qigong*, that is, the person’s own ability to heal him or herself by the practice of the body technologies, another master appeared that taught something somewhat different. *Yang Meijun*, like *Guo*, too began teaching at parks in the late 1970s. Born in 1903 she claimed to be the inheritor of the Kunlun Daoist tradition going back twenty-seven generations. Her style was known as that of the “Great Goose *Qigong,*” nowadays a very famous and popular style in China and abroad.\(^{319}\) Thus, Yang was one of the few masters that could trace their *gongfa* or particular style, to a religious tradition, rather than to martial arts or the modernized medical traditions. Apart from the gymnastic exercises Yang would use her own *qi* to treat her ill patients. *Qi* emitting was a definite divergence from the usual *qigong* taught until then, placing Yang more in the realm of religion and magic rather than science. However, *Yang* had powerful scientific voices on her side. This was the case of *Zhang Wenjie* and *Cao Jian* who not only were they students of Yang but also researchers at the prestigious Chinese Academy of Sciences, who published an article in early

\(^{319}\) There are numerous notable examples of this style of *qigong* being taught in Europe and the US. Sources for more information on Yang Meijun can be found here:

http://www.chinaqigong.net/english/qgsk/ymj.htm (accessed 14 Aug 2014);
http://www.qimagazine.com/michaelpte.html (accessed 14 Aug 2014); and
http://www.wildgooseqigong.co.uk/qigong.htm.
In 1981 in which they have no conflicting feelings between Yang’s teachings, and healing activities and science:

On the foundation of her ancestral method, master Yang learned from reputed masters everywhere, finally reaching a high level of accomplishment . . . . Her method is complete; there is no technique that she does not master, be it the arts of the still body, the moving body, or swordsmanship, or even sitting, lying or walking qigong, light or heavy qigong, the emission of qi, diagnosing illnesses, or feeling at a distance. To speak only of the emission of qi at a distance, children with Extraordinary Functions and those who have a high degree of qigong attainment can see a profusion of colors in the qi flowing from her hands. . . . Among the disciples of Yang Meijun, the great majority are scientific researchers; this is the result of the master’s arduous efforts. Generally speaking, scientific researchers . . . have a special difficulty in learning qigong. But Master Yang knows full well that for the qigong cause to develop, it cannot separate itself from modern scientific technology. If we don’t transmit high-level qigong virtuosity to people who are capable of leading scientific research, they won’t be able to understand the nature of qigong nor to accomplish research on qigong.... Qigong is a precious scientific heritage which has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors. Conserving and transmitting this heritage is a glorious mission conferred on us by history. If the millennial transmission of this exalted and profound virtuosity were to be lost with our generation, such that our descendants would be able to research qigong only through archaeology, we would be condemned by history. We take this opportunity to make this call: arise, to preserve and disseminate the grand and profound virtuosity of master Yang and other similar qigong figures, so that we can contribute as we should to our country’s research on the system of somatic science.320

This attitude would engender later the cult of the ‘charismatic’ master, that one who possessed extraordinary or mystical powers.

The environment in the early 1980s was ripe for a renewed interest in the old time and very human concern for religion. Repressed in the times of Mao, Deng Xiaoping had opened the doors for more freedom in this realm, thus fostering, perhaps without direct intention, a religious revival. These times saw the rebuilding of temples destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in the countryside as well as the re-formation of ritual networks. The cities were

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320 Translated in Palmer, *Qigong Fever*, 88–89.
more tame in their revival or rather, was expressed differently. City dwellers showed their interest on the subject by buying books on religious subjects and television shows with religious themes. The show Journey to the West, for example, was a definite hit.\(^{321}\) The expression of this mystique was particularly strong when it came to martial arts. We are all familiar with the famous Hong Kong movies on the subject and in China the fervor for this type of entertainment was no less. Who can forget all these martial arts heroes flying in the air, fighting and overcoming hundreds of enemies, could appear and disappear at will and read people’s minds, all of which had acquired through the practice of \textit{neigong}, ‘inner cultivation’ an ancient rubric for some of the practices now associated with \textit{qigong}, namely, the use of breath, meditation etc. Martial arts, nonetheless, have always been strongly linked with spiritual traditions and viewed as spiritual paths in their own right.

Thus the grandmasters were able to become these charismatic personalities who could, not only teach body technologies, but also cure the sick; after all, he possessed the magical powers of the ancient mythical figures that allowed them to do so. He was also a man of science, since \textit{qigong} was more than mystical pursuits: \textit{qigong} was a science.

Other masters to appear in the scene at this time were Liang Shifeng and Zha Jinxiang. Liang came out of a martial arts background. As mentioned earlier in China martial arts, in particular the ‘internal martial arts such as Taiji, Ba gua and Xing yi, are considered complete spiritual paths to realization. \textit{Taiji}, is probably the most recognized martial art in general, although nowadays it is taught as a form of \textit{qigong} rather than for its martial arts applications. Martial arts, then, have been understood as a set of disciplines for the cultivation of the body in a much broader and spiritual way. This is what has been called the dual cultivation of body and mind.\(^{322}\) We must keep in mind for example, that it was Bodhidharma, the creator of \textit{Zen} (\textit{Ch’an}) in China, who founded the Shaolin temple 少林寺 in China in the fifth century and began the physical training of the monks.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Liang Shifeng} taught, as Guo Lin, the \textit{qigong} of the spontaneous Five Animals Frolic, students \end{quote}

\(^{321}\) Ibid 89-90

...Were taught to concentrate on their cinnabar field at the same time that they pressed repeatedly on their navel with a finger while chanting the following mantra: “I range like an immortal in the clouds. . . . I concentrate my mind on the cinnabar field, and deep relaxation gives rise to movement.”\footnote{David Ownby. \textit{Opus Cit.}, 67} After this The practitioners would fall into a trance that could last from half an hour to two hours. During this time several things could happen. The practitioner could perform a self-massage, acupressure on different parts of the body. Sometimes spontaneous movements like Taiji chuan or dance moves would be triggered. On other occasions the person would roll on the ground. The idea was that after a period of refinement of the practice, the practitioner would spontaneously imitate the movements of the five animals, that is, those of the tiger, the deer, the bear, the bird, and the monkey.\footnote{Ibid}

\textit{Yan Xin} \footnote{This section is taken mostly from David Palmer, \textit{Opus Cit.} Chapter 5.}

With \textit{Yan Xin} begins the era of the true \textit{qigong} superstars during the years of the \textit{qigong} fever, (\textit{qigong re}). This was a young man, completely unknown Chinese medicine practitioner who, in 1985, rose to stardom after he performed a miracle cure. He was worshipped as a god by the crowds and became the embodiment of the \textit{qigong} master, someone who held infinite powers and used them mostly for healing. He was born in a peasant family in \textit{Fuyan} village, in Sichuan. After finishing high school he had been sent to the countryside as a barefoot doctor. After this he studied Chinese medicine at the \textit{Chengdu} Institute if Chinese Medicine, which led him to a teaching position in \textit{Mianyang}, not far from his own hometown. Around this time he became disciple of the famous \textit{Shaolin} monk \textit{Haideng}. The “miracle cure” occurred when he was able to heal through the use of his powers, \textit{Jiang Zili}, a man that, having been struck by a truck, was not expected to recover his full mobility. Thus, with the help of the media he went from unknown, to regionally known to a national superstar. He started to receive requests for healing from people all over China, and he, as much as he could, obliged, roaming the country and not charging for his services. He established himself as a man of honesty and integrity, a true servant of the people.
In 1986 Zhang Zhenhuan, a high-ranking politician at the time, and an avid promoter of qigong heard of Yan Xin’s exploits and summoned him to Beijing where he was asked to heal several influential individuals. Let us say that these sessions went well and people were pleased with Yan Xin’s healing powers and its effects on their health. Because of his high status Zhang Zhenhuan was very well connected and through his networks Yan Xin’s reputation soared. By the end of 1986 he was celebrated in the prominent national newspaper Guangming Daily, which says, among other things “…in each city, he treats the ill, who describe his medical art as sublime and virtuous…He combines in a single body Chinese medicine, qigong, martial arts and Extraordinary Powers; his treatments often have incredible results.”\(^{326}\) Yan Xin is also invited in the same year, to conduct experiments at Qinghua University. The subject matter is, of course, Yan’s qi, and his abilities to heal the sick. One of the experiments consisted in having Yan emit qi at a distance of up to 2000 km, into different substances. The experiments were successful insofar as changes were recorded in the substances. These substances (0.9 per cent saline, 50 per cent glucose solution, and 1.5 mg/ml medemycene) could be found in human cells, which made the experiments the more important as far as healing is concerned. The conclusion was that Yan Xin’s qi, emitted from long distances, and later we will learn that distance has little or nothing to do with the results, could transform the molecular structure of water.\(^{327}\) Once more we see the evidence of qi as a material, measurable substance. In January of 1987 the news was reported all over China, including the Guangming Daily and the international edition of the People’s Daily. Thus Yan Xin had corroborated once more what in years prior had catapulted qigong into the qigong realm.

Yan Xin was still receiving requests for healing from all over the country and, so he could benefit more people with his healing powers China Qigong Science Research Society (CQRS) created a new way in which he could transmit his message. This was the ‘Power-inducing scientific qigong lecture’ (daigong qigong kexue baogaohui). These lectures consisted of Yan speaking to an audience about the scientific aspects of qigong as well methods of practice and healing. It was while he was delivering the lectures that Yan would emit his qi towards the audience. The idea was to conduct scientific experiments on the effects of the ‘messages’ (xinxì)

\(^{326}\) Translated in Palmer, Opus Cit., 139
\(^{327}\) Ibid., 141
Yan Xin was sending, on the audience. The lectures were sometimes long, up to fourteen hours sometimes. The audience, however remained enthralled, a rarity as far as Chinese audiences is concerned. Many would experience trances and sometimes paraplegics would stand up and walk. 328

_Yan Xin_ gave over 200 lectures between 1987 and 1988, totaling an audience of approximately one million. These lectures were not free, but tickets costing 100 _yuan_, a months’ wages at the time, would be usually sold out in half a day. _Yan Xin_ had acquired the fame a super celebrity.

There were other examples (Palmer says, “_Yan Xin_ imitators were legion”) of _qigong_ masters rising to prominence, but for the purpose of this work the sample provided should suffice.

The End of Qigong

There were several events that began to weigh down on _qigong_ and the favor that it had enjoyed in this second wave. One of these problems was the so-called ‘deviations’, that is states of health challenges that were triggered, exacerbated or directly caused by the practice of _qigong_. This was called _zouhuo rumo_ (走火入魔 or _qigong biancha_ 气功偏差). The sheer figure of _qigong_ practitioners had grown to such numbers that this syndrome had become a problem. When practicing _qigong_, depending on the style (_gongfa_), there is a potential danger of developing this kind of condition. This kind of condition is characterized by

...uncontrolled effects, either physiological, as in ‘becoming inflamed’ – headaches, nausea, or pain in various parts of the body, disrupted circulation of _qi_, increased blood pressure, uncontrolled body movements etc. – or mental, as in ‘falling into a spell’ – delirium, paranoia, hallucinations, passivity, loss of mental faculties, incoherent speech, severe emotional distress or behavior harmful to oneself or others. 329 Families began taking their relatives with these

328 Ibid., 144
329 Ibid., 158
symptoms to the outpatient clinics of psychiatric hospitals, some of which had opened special clinics for this purpose only. Some of these patients would develop serious psychopathologies and end up dead from attempting to fly from a tall building, for example, or would refuse food or drink while doing ‘abstention from grains’ or *bigu*. Others would outright commit suicide in order to ‘ascend to heaven’. It goes without saying that these cases played right into the hands of the anti-*qigong* polemicists as ammunition against the *qigong* sector.

The other problem that the *qigong* sector faced at the time was that of quackery. So many *qigong* masters wanted to cash in on what they saw as a great opportunity for profit. The power-inducing lectures, video screenings and the sale of *qi*-filled objects had become commodities to be traded in a *qigong* market of sorts. The scene turned into a myriad of self-proclaimed grandmasters, offering their services and charging high fees for healing sessions and *qi*-filled objects; as a matter of course, they claimed to be able to cure anything.

Many of the extraordinary powers detractors had become considerably louder in their skepticism and crusade against the extraordinary powers movement. In March of 1988 the *Science and Technology Daily* invited members of an American association, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) to China to investigate the claims of extraordinary powers, offering a $10,000 to whoever could prove their existence. Embarrassingly enough, those *qigong* masters and children claiming to have the extraordinary powers could not demonstrate their alleged powers to the foreign delegates. A few months later even the famous Zhang Baosheng could not demonstrate his supposedly remarkable powers in front of a group of skeptical scientists. Thus, little by little, the popularity and favor encountered early from the part of the government started eroding. After the *Tiananmen* Square massacre in 1989 the authorities decided to tighten the control over *qigong* activities, making denominations register their schools as well as levy taxes on them. Many schools closed.

To make matters worse the famous Zhang XiangYu, a *qigong* master was arrested in May of 1990 for quackery. After she had held several lectures and made a considerable amount

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330 Ibid., 159

331 Ibid., 160-161
of money from them, many of the people that attended them came down with the ‘qigong deviation’ symptoms. Moreover, several of these patients died shortly after receiving treatment from her. She was sentenced to seven years in prison, a fact widely reported in the press, which called her a ‘witch’ and a ‘swindler.’ This event had an unsettling effect on the qigong community. 332

Yan Xin, the first qigong, grandmaster superstar also came on hard times. After giving his last two power inducing lectures in a Shanghai stadium in front of thousands of people only a few people felt Yan’s qi and another died after falling down with convulsions.

After these events Yan was given a passport and instructions to better make this trip to the USA a long one. Things were not safe in China considering the atmosphere that the anti qigong movement had fostered in the last few years and the rather visible failures of some aspects of qigong. The qigong fever had definitely subsided by the mid nineties. And the fall out of Falungong with the government made qigong simply a marginal enterprise no longer supported by the official regime.

A Word on Falun Gong

In September of 1999 I fulfilled a lifelong dream of mine by going to China. I had been living in different countries in Asia since September of 1995, and had been in Taiwan for over a year by then. So, I bought a ticket, packed my backpack and off I went. My intention on going to Mainland China was twofold. First I just wanted to go and visit that old and, at least according to ancient sources, a magnificent culture. However, I had been bitterly disappointed the first time around, when I arrived in Taiwan (and Asia for the first time), and it looked much more grim and run down that I was prepared for. As one can imagine, this time my expectations were not too high. Learning a particular form of qigong was my second reason. I decided to practice Zhineng qigong, better known in the USA a Chilel qigong. If this particular style was not available I was wiling to study some other style or qi practice. In Taiwan my experience had

332 Ibid., 165
been that finding people from whom to learn qigong was usually not a problem; and for what had been told about China, I should have the same experience. After a thirty-hour train ride from Hong Kong, I arrived in Beijing. The first day I took time and got somewhat acquainted with the hotel and the surroundings. After this, I was ready to go out to find some qigong practitioners. However, after visiting a couple parks, most of which charged a fee to outsiders to get in, I couldn’t really find that group or just about any other group practicing qigong. There were people around but, by Chinese standards, the parks were deserted. I tried to approach some of the people that were there and inquire about people or courses, but, apparently, no one wanted to have much to do with me, much less about qigong.

At the time I had not realized what had happened. We had all heard the news about Falun Gong having fallen out of grace with the government. This took place in March of 1999. Now it was September, and to my surprise, the problems Falun Gong practitioners faced had not abated. Not by a long shot. Adding insult to injury, it was not only Falun Gong that had fallen out of grace but the entire qigong community as well.

I stayed in Beijing a few more days; I visited the Great Wall and the Summer Palace, as one does when visiting Beijing. After my original plans had been thwarted, I bought another train ticket and headed for Chengdu, on the other side of China. This was a most definitely, no-fun thirty-one hour long sitting trip to the western corner of China. The trip was grueling and my feet remained swollen for a couple of days after arriving in Chengdu. Chengdu seemed more tranquil than the buzzing, massive metropolis that is Beijing. On the other side of China, far from the epicenter of the Falun Gong debacle, the tone of the insurrection had not hit as hard. At least that was my guess. I doubt, nevertheless, that the Falun Gong practitioners were totally off the hook there but everyone else seemed to be.

The atmosphere was also more conducive to practicing qigong. This time I had no problem finding a group of practitioners. As luck would have it I found a lively group of zhineng qigong practitioners right across the river, and the hotel I was staying. They practiced every day at six thirty in the morning, for at least couple of hours, sometimes longer than that. I did this for about a week, and they did not even charge me, which I found surprising.
What happened to Falun Gong? Why did they fall out of grace with the Chinese state? This does not have a simple answer. However we will begin by stating, as we all know for sure, but must be said, that the Chinese Communist Party, as a general, Marxist principle, thinks poorly of any religious movement, in any shape or form. Let us remember that qigong had to be excised of all its ‘feudal’ undertones just so the Chinese authorities could accept it as a viable medical practice, never as a source of spiritual nourishment, which it was anyway. This is something that they could never completely eradicate.

Falun Gong practitioners have, by their own admission, said that it is nothing more than a cultivation practice. The rise of Falun Gong, on the other hand, has to be attributed to his founder Li Hongzhi, who did what every other qigong superstar of the qigong fever era had done to make his particular school of qigong popular. He toured the country giving lectures, selling books and tapes, thus building a nationwide qigong organization. Falun Gong was, most definitely, another school or style of qigong gongfa, a cultivation practice, although Li made great efforts to differentiate his brand of qigong from the rest. However, from the start qigong had always had its detractors if not outright enemies. The Cultural Revolution had seen a resurgence of these antagonistic views and many practitioners suffered as a consequence. The enemies of qigong had never totally gone away and in the early 90’s their power was on the rise once again. Their reasons were the usual suspects. Religious activities or thought were not welcome in a country that had been trying hard to excise its feudal and ‘superstitious’ traditions from the culture in general. Li had not helped his cause or the qigong cause at large, by placing so much emphasis on himself as the source of the teaching and no one else. For example, he declared that his book, Zhuan falun (the revolving dharma wheel) had to be considered the “bible” for Falun Gong practitioners, and only by reading and rereading this one book one could hope to come to a true understanding of the teachings. “ Li was quite adamant that no one except him was to teach, preach, or explain Zhuan falun and that practitioners were to establish a one-to- one relationship with the master, no matter where his physical body might be.

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333 David Ownby. Falung Gong and the Future of China. Opus Cit. 23
334 Ibid
335 Ibid
Of course, the *qigong* exercises were to be continued, this was after all one of the main, if not the main aspects of the tradition. And, as Palmer had astutely noted, *qigong* was a ‘body-centered religiosity’, regardless of what the Chinese authorities wanted to believe. The body, like any other cultivation exercise of embodiment, remained the center of this practice.

In early 1995 Li, apparently suspecting that something was amiss, chose to leave China for the United States. Perhaps because of this, the Falun Gong practitioners became more active in their peaceful protests against what they considered slights or misrepresentations by the media and demanded equal time for themselves to defend their cause. In the beginning the slights were not directed exclusively at *Falun Gong* but at *qigong* at large.

David Ownby puts the events that follow very clearly,

An absent master, devoted practitioners willing to engage in civil disobedience, and a central government less and less enamored of the *qigong* movement—such were the ingredients for a disaster, and all were in place by the late 1990s. And indeed, when a peaceful Falun Gong protest in mid-April 1999 in the northern city of Tianjin, in response to a critical article appearing in a limited-circulation journal, was met with police brutality, a decision was made—surely by *Li Hongzhi*, who was in Beijing en route to Australia—to employ the same strategy at the highest possible level, that of China’s central leadership. Thus, on 25 April 1999, some 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners staged a peaceful demonstration outside the gates of *Zhongnanhai*, the guarded compound where most of China’s ruling elite live and work, a stone’s throw from *Tian’anmen* Square.\(^{336}\)

Falun Gong had taken the aura of a spiritual movement, and one that could, because of the sheer numbers and organization, challenge the authority of the Chinese Communist Party. *Li Hongzhi* had established himself as a leading figure, and one that could mobilize masses of practitioners. Needles to say that this was not a good formula for the group in question since it put them in a collision course with the state. And the collision came. After the events mentioned above there was a major crackdown on anything that would even resemble *qigong* and much more if the individuals were considered Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong was

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\(^{336}\) Ibid. 15.
indeed, a religious movement,\textsuperscript{337} as I think that \textit{qigong} also was (and still is). These strands of spirituality would hide under the guise of cultivation practice, but at their core, no matter how scientific the state wanted to portray some elements of \textit{qigong}, \textit{qigong} filled a vacuum left by the (apparent) disappearance of religious expression, early in the take over by the CCP.

At any rate, the rest of the story, widely reported in the international media, is well known. The crackdown by Jiang Zemin was forceful, to put it mildly. Jiang Zemin considered the actions of Falun Gong a challenge to the authority of the Communist Party and vowed to crush Li and his followers. In a campaign that continues to this day, Falun Gong practitioners have lost over three thousand lives, and more than a hundred thousand have been sent to labor camps. Around six thousand were have been jailed and hundreds of thousands have been arrested and detained.\textsuperscript{338}

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid 5
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid
CHAPTER 5
MY QIGONG EXPERIENCE WITH DR ZHANG

Dr. Zhang’s Taiji

I met Dr. Zhang in the winter of 1991 when he was teaching a for-credit Wu style Taiji class at Samra University in Los Angeles, California, where I had enrolled to study Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).339

I had been practicing Yang style Taiji (also T’ai Chi) from the age of sixteen and I knew that Qigong practitioners consider Taiji a “dynamic” form of Qigong.340 A famous Taiji teacher, Wu Tu Nan, who lived to the ripe age of 103, had developed the Wu style taught by Dr. Zhang. Dr. Zhang told me that he and his teacher had been very close and Wu Tu Nan was very sensitive to his qi. “If I had been in China,” he said, “he would probably still be alive.” His implication was that he could have preserved the old teacher’s health with medical Qigong.

At the start of each Taiji class, Dr. Zhang would stand in the northernmost part of the room, facing west. From there, he would begin the opening movement of Taiji. From the outset I observed that Dr. Zhang’s version of the slow and deliberate, gracefully flowing movements was subtly different from the more widely practiced Yang-style Taiji, with which most of his students were familiar. The 108 moves of Wu Taiji follow the same sequence as the Yang-style, but the Wu forms are softer and more relaxed, and place more emphasis on stretching the limbs and joints.

The fifteen students would spend the 90-minute classes mirroring Dr. Zhang’s forms. For didactic purposes, he divided the 108 moves into different sections. Every week we would advance in a new section and then add it to the segments already learned, thus practicing

339 The only other school at the time that offered credit for similar courses was Naropa Institute (now called Naropa University) founded in the 1970s in Boulder, Colorado, by the late Tibetan lama, Chogyam Trungpa.
340 Qigong, as discussed in previous chapters, is an umbrella term developed in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s in Communist China to describe and foment a wide array of often-disparate techniques stemming from millennia-old longevity practices.
increasing longer sequences of movements. Imitating his precise movements took a good deal of energy and concentration. Sometimes we stood back to watch intently as he repeatedly demonstrated the more difficult moves. The room was silent during these times, everyone deeply focused, trying to “get” with our bodies the exercise the master was conveying. Then, when he sensed we were growing tired, we would take a break. Immediately the class would come alive with talking, laughter, and perhaps a bit of moaning because of achy muscles. After ten or fifteen minutes we would begin again.

During these breaks I would approach Dr. Zhang to seek answers to the many questions that had developed in my mind over my years of practicing, reading and thinking about Taiji. His command of English was poor, but somehow I could always make my query clear enough for him to understand me, and he was invariably patient and kind and willing to share his knowledge. 341

My main interest was the qi (Chinese: “energy” or “life-force”) aspect of the practice. I would ask whether to focus the mind here or there, or to hold an image this or that way, or how the qi was supposed to move, and so forth. I remember asking about an author who recommended visualizing the qi rising from the earth into the legs and then shooting out the arms while performing the an (a pushing movement). “There’s no need for that, Patrick,” he said, and did the pushing movement with his left hand while pointing at the floor and tracing a path up his leg, trunk, and arm. “If you push and use your yi (“mind-intent”), your energy will do that on its own.”

Since Taiji was original a martial art, there are several martial movements that, because they are performed so slowly they do not seem too martial-like. There are kicks, kneeling, and punches to be sure, but those are performed slowly and with great awareness. The main idea is to remain relaxed at all time while practicing. An often-repeated instruction is to guide the movement with your mind. It also calls on other images such as “repulse the monkey” or “single whip”, “brushing your knee” etc. Perhaps the most famous, and we may add, most useful in terms of harmonizing the energies and helping its flow is “cloud hands.”

341 I had not studied Chinese at that time. Later, while living in Taiwan, I studied both in university courses as well as privately. It remains a work in progress.
Dr. Zhang’s Medical Qigong

Two months after the Taiji class, I began a yearlong course in “Medical Qigong” with Dr. Zhang and Dr. Hua Huang. Medical Qigong is the practice of using one’s qi to heal others. Qigong has a large number of “styles” (called, in Chinese, gongfa). Like the various styles of Taiji (called shi 式, in Taiji parlance), each gongfa interprets a core set of movements—all of which stem from an ancient set of longevity exercises.

The one-year course met on Sundays from morning to late afternoon. Dr. Hua Huang, a Qigong physician who had researched, among other topics, the effects of Qigong on asthma patients, taught the morning session. Her research ended abruptly with the advent of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Dr. Huang was sent to jail for four years of “reeducation.” Dr. Huang taught us fundamental Qigong practices such as deep relaxation techniques and her version of the Six Healing Sounds.

I felt fortunate to be able to train under the guidance of these two Chinese Qigong masters, and many of their practices and instructions remain clear in my mind and form part and parcel of my own practice and teaching.

Near the end of the course I experienced firsthand Dr. Zhang’s potent emanation of healing qi. He stood eight feet or so from me, while I sat with my arms and hands facing up and relaxed on a desk. His energy was so strong that I had a hard time staying awake during the treatment. The tangible waves that flowed into my body included the uncanny sensation that his fingers were actually massaging my eyeballs!

My classmates’ motivations for enrolling in the Qigong course were typical for this kind of program. Some had some health challenges, and an oft-cited reason to attend was to learn stress-reduction techniques. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners were interested in learning qigong to add to their medical practice, and also wanted the techniques for self-healing. Treating patients daily is taxing and the healer can usually absorb some degree of toxicity; Qigong is extremely useful in helping to detoxify from harmful energies that are often present when encountering others, even when a healing exchange is not the reason for the interaction. Additionally, TCM practitioners wanted to be able to teach Qigong to their patients.
to practice on their own, thus becoming more aware of the energies that flow in their bodies and to empower them to be a healing force in their own and other’s lives.

A prerequisite in attending a Qigong session is to be absolutely sober. Dr. Zhang made it very clear that drunkenness or being under the influence of recreational drugs was absolutely prohibited. One of the students, a man in his late twenties, admitted during one of the sessions that he was fond of doing drugs. Dr. Zhang reprimanded him saying that the practice of Qigong was incompatible with drug use. This was not passing judgment, he explained, but a matter of safety. Drugs induce altered states of consciousness and supercharging those states with qigong could potentially damage the energy system. He warned that this dangerous combination had been known to trigger psychotic episodes.

Subtle Anatomy and Physiology

The practice of Qigong assumes the existence of a subtle anatomy and physiology, a dimension within the physical body/material physiology that one can access if one knows where and how to focus attention upon it. We began each session by standing quietly for a few moments, preparing to become more aware of the subtle energy body. Dr. Zhang would guide us in ways to help us develop the sense of our subtle energy without letting that sense overwhelm our learning. Relaxation allows the qi to flow more smoothly, and when qi flows, one is enabled to relax even more deeply. The next step is to place the mind (or yi, 意 “mind-intent”) at the energy-center at the crown of the head. Classical yoga names this center sahasrara padala, or the “thousand-petal lotus,” while Daoist texts call it bai hui 百会 or “the hundred meeting points” (alluding to the numerous acupuncture channels that converge at the crown). It is also labeled acupuncture point number 20 on the du mai (governing channel). This point is extremely important in acupuncture and Qigong as well as other energy-healing arts that use the subtle anatomy to treat disharmonies. After focusing for some time on this point, Dr. Zhang instructed us to imagine that we were rag dolls dangling by a fine filament from this locus at the crown of the head. We were guided to relax deeply and to elongate the
spine, both physically and in our minds. Tangible energy would begin to fill up the quiet room. It was a palpable sensation, as when one notices “electricity in the air,” or that a room is “thick” with tension (as when one says, “You could cut the air with a knife.”). If this particular exercise went on long enough it was not unusual to feel so stress-free in this position that one could entirely lose track of the body, feeling one’s existence to be an incorporeal field of energy.

Three Major Energy Vortexes

After the initial qi exercise, we would proceed to focusing on the three major energy vortexes, called the three dantien or “cinnabar field,” better known as the “field of elixir.” Dr. Zhang also used the Sanskrit word chakra (“wheel” or “vortex”) because most students were more familiar with this term. These centers are areas in the subtle body/physical body, where energy accumulates, hence the idea of a vortex or hub. The most emphasized is the lower dantien, in and around the navel area. Some texts describe the lower dantien as the whole area from the bottom of the pelvis to the navel and lower back; others refer to the lower dantien as the area deep in the body between the navel and the spine. Whichever locus one chooses, the effect of focusing attention there, imagining that one is breathing through the area, triggers a relaxation response, which the Chinese call ru jing (“entering stillness”). Dr. Zhang’s instructions regarding the actual location of the dantien where purposely imprecise: he would simply say, “Behind the belly.” He wanted us, individually, to find our own dantien, and discover a way to focus on it that would work for us, rather than give us detailed instructions that would limit our ability to explore and discern on our own.

Upper Dantian Shang Dantian 上丹田

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342 Cinnabar field is a term borrowed from the Chinese alchemical tradition in which the product of alchemical operations was cinnabar, understood as an elixir.
Next, we were instructed to focus the mind or attention on the center between the eyebrows (in Sanskrit, *ajna chakra*), and from it to bring attention to the deep center of the head. This is the upper *dantien*, popularly known as the “third eye”.

**Middle Dantian or Zhong Dantian 中丹田**

Is located in the middle of the chest.

**Lower Dantian, Xià Dāntián 下丹田**

Located around the navel, a few inches inside the body. Oftentimes conceived as the whole lower abdomen area, with its center between midway the navel and the spine.

Dr. Zhang would tell us to imagine moving a pulsating ball of shimmering energy located in the middle of the lower belly between the navel and the spine (lower *dantian*), up and down a few inches. This technique would arouse the *qi* to flow and would often trigger spontaneous movements. We know from TCM, which shares most of its theories with *Qigong*, that the state of bodily harmony or health is a state in which life-energy courses freely and uninterruptedly through the meridians, organs, and vessels. Bringing awareness to the body, and in particular the *dantien*, increases the available energy and, when the *dantien* becomes full of energy like a dam that has reached its brim, the *qi* begins to overflow and flood into the different energy channels and areas of the body-mind.

I think that Dr. Zhang, being well aware of the potential danger of practicing *Qigong* too intently or even obsessively, was always cautious of what he was teaching us. He never overwhelmed us with difficult exercises and he often emphasized the need to take it easy. Once when we were doing an exercise and he was explaining where to place the *yi* or mind-intent, I asked: “How much mind should we place there? Fifty percent?” He replied, “No, fifty percent is too much. Ten percent is enough. The rest, just relax; let go of that other 90 percent of the mind.”

Depending on the state of health of the individual (which can vary from day to day), a person practicing *Qigong* might experience a deep sense of well-being and even altered states
of consciousness. A state of sublime peace, for example, is not uncommon. Other common experiences may involve a vivid sensation of qi flowing through the meridians or pulsating in one particular area or chakra.

On the other hand, people at times feel nauseated, or outright sick. A spontaneous movement may occur, as the body is impelled by the inner urge to contort or stretch or shake uncontrollably. These artless movements are not usually extreme and exaggerated—but at times they may seem bizarre! Most often, people simply feel the impulse to move or walk, raise their arms, bend forward or backward, twist and stretch. Others may perform very subtle micro-movements.

At this point in the exercises, Dr. Zhang would walk around the classroom checking our postures and if I had not moved when spontaneous movements had begun in others, he would gently place his hands on my shoulders and press from side to side, apparently trying to elicit them. I had my eyes closed but I assume that he went around the room doing this to others as well. Other times he would stand behind us sweeping his hands. His energy was potent and I could feel its effect on my body as a tingling on my back and a feeling of relaxation.

The Mingmen 命門, The Gate of Life

Next in the sequence would come focusing the mind-intent on the navel. We were told to imagine drawing a straight horizontal line toward the back until it “touches” the spine. In the practice of Qigong, we often focused on this important energy vortex, called mingmen, 命門 (“gate of life,” located on the spine directly behind the navel). While gently swaying the body back and forth, we were taught to picture the energy flowing from navel to spine and back. We repeated this exercise several times.
Animal Movements

The Elephant. Arriving next in the sequence are animal-imitating movements. These exercises need not be performed in any precise manner, and in any qigong workshop one can see how each student interprets these movements according to his or her own idiosyncrasies.

The next exercise in the sequence is called “the elephant.” Its name derives from the observation that when elephants feel anxious, they sway from side to side, slightly lifting one front leg and placing most of the weight on the other. The Qigong version is to rotate the hips towards one side, then the other, without straining, while letting the arms follow. The weight shifts from leg to leg. The dangling, flopping arms do not apply any force in the movement. This exercise activates what is popularly called “the core,” but from a more subtle point of reference. The core (lower dantien) is the most important and fundamental energy to activate and keep activated throughout our lives. The core, or dantian, is of major import in Qigong (and in tantra/kundalini yoga as well), and a Qigong student continues the art of focusing the mind on it, even at the mastery level of advancement.

The movement in the next section is called “Imitating the bear.” This involves walking like a bear; that is, placing most of the weight on one leg and bringing the arm and shoulder down on the same side while stepping a little more slowly than usual and repeating the movement on the other side. One walks like a bear for a few minutes, which feels very playful and relaxing.

Next is “Horse-shakes-its-man.” One shakes the upper part of the body like a horse quivering its mane. This exercise involves many muscles, and is exhilarating and exhausting. It gets blood and qi moving quickly, and sweat trickling down one’s brow. The subsequent exercise is “Bird-shakes-its-feathers.” It is similar to the previous movement but here the emphasis is on the arms and shoulders rather than the whole trunk. When this shaking is done one feels refreshed and relaxed, and often, out of breath.
Opening the Joints

The next sequence uses the mind and correspondences in the body to “open up” different joints. Thus, one follows the maxim: “First connect; then stretch.” One starts with either shoulder (let us begin with the right), focusing attention on the right shoulder joint until it relaxes. (One may include the intention to relax the shoulder, but the relaxation will occur automatically just through focusing.) Once we feel the shoulder area relaxed and expanded, we bring the mind to the left hip. This is accompanied by a movement of the shoulder towards that hip, so one slouches slightly to the left side. When one feels the connection between the two joints one slowly brings the shoulder back to upright posture. The purpose is to open both the shoulder and hip joint, and to link the body’s parts in a way that is harmonious, increasing the overall flow of qi and feeling of “oneness.” One repeats this movement several times until one senses one has successfully opened those two joints. Then one moves to the left shoulder joint and does the same exercise. After that comes the joint proximate to the right shoulder, i.e., the right elbow. One focuses there for a few minutes until the elbow joint feels relaxed and expanded. After one gets this sensation, one moves towards the left knee, slouching to the left as when one did the shoulder-to-hip movement. One links in awareness with the left knee. Then one stretches the elbow with the knee until the knee relaxes and expands. This brings a greater flow of qi and blood to both joints. In fact, focusing attention on any area of the body will have the same effect. ³⁴³

Finally, is the wrist-ankle “connect and stretch”. One repeats the same sequence but now with the wrist and ankle, opposite each other. After completing the exercise with the three joints on both sides, one we move on to the following exercise.

³⁴³One can do an easy experiment to demonstrate this. While sitting quietly, place attention in the palm of the right hand. Inevitably, after a few minutes, one will feel a tingling or warm sensation in the palm. If we inspect the skin of the palm we will notice that it will look redder than usual, a result of increased blood (and qi) flow to it.
The next section, also done while standing, is taken from the most important Taiji movements known as Peng, Lu, Ji, and An. 棚,捋,挤,按 (“ward off,” “rollback,” “press,” and “push”). First is peng, where arms float upward, “like a canoe floating on water.” While one performs this movement, very slowly, the mind focuses on the hui yin point, 会阴, (the perineum, between the genitals and the anus). In taiji, “peng” is done to either side, but in Qigong it is usually performed with a balanced stance raising both rounded arms in front of the body.

Lu is done with the arms coming down diagonally or to the sides while the attention is focused on the baihui 百會 point at the crown of the head. This exercise attempts to raise the qi, starting as usual at the bottom, with the idea that qi must first rise up the spine, and then descend on the front of the body via the ren channel. One brings the qi back down with the remaining movements of the sequence.

The Ji movements begin with placing the left arm in front, palm facing inward at throat height. One brings the right hand lightly to the wrist and presses against an imaginary force with the backside of the left hand and wrist, “like pushing a balloon forward and then rebounding backward.” Then one performs the same movement on the other side.

An means “pushing.” It involves two steps: first one brings down the arms “as if sinking a ball in water, and then rebounding upward.” Dr. Zhang emphasized this rebounding action. When he performed an it looked as if a buoyant force actually was pushing his arms suddenly but softly upward.

A breathing exercise ends the sequence of standing exercises. Breathing in Qigong and in nearly all Daoist practices is done as if respiring through the lower abdomen (dantien). This final exercise involves standing straight and pressing both hands inward on the navel while exhaling. When inhaling, one pushes the hands outward, inflating the abdominal area. This trains the body-mind to breathe more fully, as we once did naturally as children. Breathing in

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344 The Zen tradition, as well, emphasizes the importance of focused breathing on the dantien (in Japanese, tanden.)
and out through the nose we touch the tongue to the upper palate, behind the teeth. This latter action helps to close to circuit of two main energy channels in the body, namely, the Du mai and the Ren mai, creating a current of qi that flows (usually, but not always) up the spine and down the front of the body respectively.

After practicing the movement part of the series, a palpable accumulation of qi, felt by everyone, energized the sitting portion. Again, this perception of a tangible vitality shared by the group can be likened to the much more common experience of feeling a “charged atmosphere that one could cut with a knife”—although in the latter case, the “charge” is usually some emotional or sexual tension.

The Six Healing Sounds

We sat in chairs in a circle. In the Qigong context, chairs are used instead of sitting on the floor like most meditation traditions, as the purpose is to be comfortable enough to deeply relax. Also, considering that many people who come to this practice do so with health challenges (Qigong is widely practiced in Chinese hospitals), it is more practical to use chairs. Even bedridden patients can practice by slightly modifying their posture. Dr Zhang would sit on the western side of the room facing east, the traditional orientation because of the association of the east with sunrise. I sat across the circle facing him, eyes open. We were instructed to place hands on knees, palms up (a receptive gesture to absorb qi). Looking at the floor, we were to focus our attention on the apex of an imaginary equilateral triangle formed in front of our feet (the base being the imaginary line at the toes. This exercise was to help us dispel negative or sick qi. We exhale forcefully five times “through the toes” while keeping our focus on the apex of the triangle. Then we switch the focus to the base of the triangle, and finally, place awareness on the toes.

These are the two most important channels in longevity practice. The Du channel runs up the spine, and the Ren channel circulates down the front and center of the body. This circuit is called the “Small Heavenly Circle”.

345 These are the two most important channels in longevity practice. The Du channel runs up the spine, and the Ren channel circulates down the front and center of the body. This circuit is called the “Small Heavenly Circle”.

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The order in which the sounds are performed must follow the natural “parent-child” relationship in which each agent nourishes and then transforms into the next. That is, all five agents or phases (less accurately called “the Five Elements”) are conceived as energy functions that engender one another, and this interdependent scheme shows how these energies operate in the body and also in the universe at large.

9. The Five Phases Dynamics

The natural sequence in which each agent feeds and then turns into the next agent is as follows: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water (please refer to the diagrams above).

Without question, this model of the anatomy and physiology of the subtle body is literally off the charts of Western materialistic science and medicine. To wit: Western anatomy locates the liver as the large physical organ on the right side of the trunk between the right nipple and the lower ribcage; but Chinese anatomy regards the liver as a function of life-energy rather than merely a physical organ; as such, the liver function (and energetic channel) is located along both sides of the ribcage. This is particularly obvious when liver disharmonies are experienced and the pain is, indeed, felt on both sides of the ribcage where the liver channels up the torso.

We are sitting with palms up, eyes opened or closed, prepared to practice the liver sound that corresponds to the wood agent. The liver sound is written “xu” and pronounced “shuuuuu” (exactly as if pronouncing the word “shoe” without voicing it). One lets the air out of the lungs through the throat and makes the liver sound by bringing the tongue to the upper palate behind the teeth. Sounding xu, we focus on the Liver 3 point (taichong or “great surge point” on the liver meridian, a spot found between the big toe and second toe or in the “depression distal to the junction of the first and second metatarsal bones”). This is a major acupuncture point or “little chakra,” as I like to call them, and is frequently used in acupuncture treatments to help the liver maintain or recover its natural patency. Typically, we repeat the sound six times, but this number is not fixed and we may sound more or less depending on our condition. The first three times we make the sound, we imagine the vibration causing the qi to flow outwards from the liver point, expelling the sick or ping qi from the organ and body. The last three times we make the liver sound while picturing good, positive qi entering the meridian through the Liver 3 channel to nourish and rebalance the liver. Dr. Zhang would guide us in performing the sound and say, “Qi goes out from the body” and then, on the third repetition he would remind us, “Think of the energy is coming inside, through the point into the organ.”

The next sound in the Parent-Child order is that of the heart. Here it is important to keep the palms turned up. In preparation to performing the sound we place our awareness on the side of the wrist on which the heart channel runs, that is, on the pinky finger side of the arm and hand (refer to chart). On the crease of the wrist on that side is located the Heart 7 point or shenmen (“gate of the spirit”). The heart sound is “HE”—much like exhaling an exaggerated and sustained sigh. We apply the same healing principles as in the previous organ: The first three times we make the sound we focus on sick, stale or negative energy going out through the shenmen point; with the last three repetitions energy comes in through the point, nourishing the heart.

347 Specifically, on the pisiform bone and the ulna, on the radial side of the tendon of m. flexor carpi-ulnaris.
Following the heart (the fire agent) we find that ashes turn into earth; the organ corresponding to earth is the spleen. However, in TCM the spleen energy-functions are related to the stomach and pancreas, and with those organs they form the energetic and functional system called “earth.” We focus awareness at the solar plexus, just below the sternum. Then we bring the awareness to the inside of the foot right behind the big toe; more precisely, the point proximal and inferior to the head of the first metatarsal bone (See chart). The sound of the spleen is “HU” (“hoooooooo”), like pronouncing the word “who,” but without emphasizing the “h” sound. We follow the same three-breath-expulsion, three-breath-reception procedure as above.

Ashes turn into earth and earth changes into metal. Now we focus on the Lung 7 point, liuque, on the side of the forearm. The sound is “SI”, a hissing sound made with the tongue and the teeth coming together. We repeat the procedure of three ins and three outs.

The next “organ” in this sequence is the gall bladder. Although this organ does not follow the sequence of the Five Agents, the gall bladder, along with the liver, is considered a major energy-function, and is called the official in charge of our decision-making ability. The sound of the gallbladder is “XI,” and one brings awareness to the topside of the foot, Gallbladder 42 in TCM. When making this sound one is to stretch the lips as if smiling. The repetitions for this sound are seven; the first four times the awareness is on the sick qi leaving through the point, cleansing the organ and meridian; on the next three, the qi enters the point, nourishing the gallbladder channel and organ.

The last of the Five Agents is the kidneys, corresponding to the element water. The kidneys in TCM and Daoist yoga are of primary importance because the most fundamental energies that allow life to manifest are found here. This point will be discussed later. One focuses awareness on the area behind the navel on the spine; more specifically: two finger-breadths below the lower border of the spinous process of the second lumbar vertebra. The sound for the kidneys is “QU” or “CHUI,” pronounced “Chooooo”—an explosive sound, much like a sneeze ah-CHOO! (minus the first part) and repeated nine times. The negative energy of

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348 It is located superior to the styloid process of the radius, approximately one and one quarter inches away from the wrist.

349 On the depression distal to the junction of the fourth and fifth metatarsals, on the lateral side of the tendon of m. extensor digiti minimi.
the kidneys is fear. If anxiety is a personal issue, one may choose to focus on this emotion with the intent to ameliorate it. However, this is the last organ in the sequence and by now the feeling of energy has become quite intense.

By now energy has taken over; we are in a light or heavy trance, the mind is in its own world, the body may feel heavy or light, or vanished altogether. The qi might resonate as a standing wave in one spot or flow up the spine; it might feel cold or hot. At times we felt an intense desire to move, propelled by the energy surging within. “Don’t be alarmed,” Dr. Zhang assured us. “It’s okay. That’s qi doing its thing.” He told us to allow the movements to occur. Sometimes it may happen that we do not feel much, or feel only a subtle sensation, like being enveloped in an ethereal cloud. Dr. Zhang said that whether we felt the energy or not, it would work its healing “magic,” for example, promoting a freer circulation of qi in the channels and collaterals, and bringing about a greater balance of yin and yang.\textsuperscript{350}

Once Dr. Zhang stepped into the center of the circle of students and opened his hands, fingers pointing to the sides, palms facing the earth. He moved in a semicircle and acted as if “pushing” something into the earth. I think he was trying to ground the energy, the invisible force we had poured into the inner circle. At the end of the meditation one of the students said: “Dr. Zhang, you’re a brave man for stepping into that circle. It didn’t feel a safe place to be.” It did, indeed, feel as if all the energies we had rid from our bodies had gathered in a highly charged cloud in the center of the circle.

At the end of the six sounds healing practice we were instructed to imagine a vertical line running from the crown of the head to the \textit{huiyin} or bottom of the pelvis. This is called the \textit{zhong} 中 or middle channel, an energetic line that is of paramount importance in the practice of Qigong. The three \textit{dantien} plus two other energetic areas are imagined to be balls of energy hovering at different points on this channel. In descending order, the \textit{baihui} is the topmost area at the crown, followed by the upper \textit{dantien} (“third eye”), then the middle \textit{dantien} (heart center, at the level of the solar plexus, below the sternum), then the lower \textit{dantien} (mid-lower trunk, between the navel and the spine), and last is the \textit{huiyin} (the perineum) at the pelvic base.

\textsuperscript{350} Yin and yang are never statically balanced (50/50), but always dynamically harmonizing: a seesaw game in which the amplitude may vary little or much, depending on the state of the body-mind.
After some moments focusing on these areas we were instructed to expect some kind of sensation, perhaps a pulsation, in the lower abdomen. “Now transfer the energy to the perineum, then the coccyx.” Usually, the energy flows up the spine at this point. If not, we are instructed to wait for three breaths, using natural abdominal breathing: we exhale and focus on a particular area then inhale and relax, concentrating on the “interior forehead” (i.e., upper dantien).

We were instructed to not worry if no feeling of qi was felt in the abdomen or the Du channel. Beginners more often than not do not have sufficient qi to flow to the spine, or we are not yet sensitive enough. It all develops in due time through practice. It is important not to tense up and try to force things because this could cause more harm than good.

Finally, we must connect the three dantiens in a straight line. Dr. Zhang emphasized that this step was critical. Doing this ensured sure that the qi would be stored in the body and not get dissipated, bringing our efforts to naught.
CHAPTER 6  
LIMINALITY, EMBODIMENT AND THE SIX HEALING SOUNDS OF QIGONG

Introduction

It is time to address qigong, the experience, and the states of mind it elicits from a different perspective. It is here that the ideas of anthropologist Victor Turner will proof useful. When experiencing the different states of consciousness there is a distinct stepping into something different, something akin to a separation from ordinary reality. Turner also describes a state of separation, the liminal state, although when he does he is describing events happening in the realm of social structures and everyday intercourse. However, his notions of liminality fit conveniently within the parameters of ideas I want to explain using this concept. It is my extrapolation of his idea of liminality where I diverge from his approach but only in the sense that I use it to explain something of a different sphere. Thus I will apply the notion of liminality and, it will be examined how, and if the idea of communitas can be applied to qigong, and the realm of consciousness.

Victor Turner’s idea of Liminality

Victor Turner takes the idea of liminality from the French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in his “rites de passage;” he formulated this idea after examining certain cultural rituals characterized by a period, or periods, of separation from the normal comings and goings of social life and interaction. He describes these ‘normal’ times as the “structure of positions”, the “basic model of society.”

351 “We must regard”, he says, “the period of margin or ‘liminality’ as

an intercultural situation.”³⁵² The maximal expression of these *rites de passage* are found in their purest form in “small scale, relatively stable and cyclical societies,” albeit this idea of liminality is also found in more diluted forms in more complex ones (which expression is often found in what he termed ‘liminoid’ or liminal-like rituals or social situations, as opposed to the full or complete expression of the traditional ones). The rites then, consist of transitions that involve a change of state, by which he means a change from one relatively fixed cultural condition into another. Examples of these are a change in “legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree.”³⁵³ For Turner this period is a transition, a process of becoming and transformation. *Rites de passage* then, can be understood metaphorically as well; as water being heated to boiling, or a pupa being the transitional period before its transformation into a moth. For Van Gennep all these rites of transition are characterized by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*) and aggregation. Thus, the first part involves separation and detachment from the social structure by symbolic behavior, “from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a state).”³⁵⁴ The next phase, however, is the stage of the passenger, of the ambiguous traveler, the one that is neither here nor there. The ‘passenger’ comes from a world tangible and known, but in the liminal state he or she “passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.”³⁵⁵ In the coming state of reaggregation or reincorporation, the passage is consummated. Once more the stability of the new state has been established and the voyager between the realms has arrived at his or her new destination.³⁵⁶

There are other characteristics of this state of being in the liminal state. Thus, the “threshold people,” i.e., people in that liminal state, also connotes the idea of ‘invisibility’. Since they are betwixt and between, the positions assigned and “arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”³⁵⁷ In the case of a male, this socio-cultural context does not allow for the

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³⁵² Ibid
³⁵³ Ibid
³⁵⁴ Ibid 47
³⁵⁵ Ibid
³⁵⁷ Ibid 95
notion of ‘not a boy - not a man’, which is what a male in a rite of passage from puberty to manhood is.

I argue, then, that the practice of qigong elicits, the entering into an alternate state of consciousness, a subjective state to be sure, a liminal state in which the structured world ceases to exist for a few moments, minutes or hours; the ordinary state of mind is left behind, for the duration or effect of the exercise. This state, this threshold, is reached by virtue of an inner attitude, a shift in attention and intention, a mental state; it is a focusing of the mental energies onto an inner landscape, sometimes outer as well, that is not of this world, a metaworld, as it were. It is the envisioning of a world of inner activities, of orbs (organs), functions and forces that, transcending physicality, embody energies, emotions, and other qualities that lie beyond the purview of this everyday, ‘down to earth’ life.

This inner world is accessed by a shift in our awareness, a turning of the mind’s eye from the external world to the inner landscape of the body consciousness. When the practitioner does this, he or she accesses the subtle realm of energies and consciousness, of another body, the subtle body. This realm, as we will see momentarily, is the world that qigong presupposes in its quest for health recovery, health maintenance or other loftier, more ‘mystical’ goals. Here, we will examine the body as the locus of this inner world, the limen, or “threshold,” taking into account the fundamental notions that the old longevity practitioners and Daoists attributed to the manifested universe.

Communitas

Victor Turner also says that there is a “close connection between social conflict and ritual and “that a multiplicity of conflict situations is correlated with a high frequency of ritual performance.” It is difficult now to say specifically and individually, why the people that attended the workshop where indeed there, but the reasons, for the most part, and as far as I

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358 There is a considerable difference between the western and Chinese notions of the viscera or ‘organs’. Regarding these differences, see Nathan Sivin. Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China. Center for Chinese Studies, The Universi (January 1, 1987) 34
know and remember, were healing of some kind, relief from stress, debilitating pain; even curiosity should not, perhaps, be excluded as a reason to attend one of these courses. Health issues are usually a major motivator for attending such courses, to be sure, but not always, as it was my case. I was there to learn more about “qigong,” to experience the numinous, to explore my own body mind capabilities further, and to investigate what I conceived as a legitimate spiritual path.

As we have seen in previous chapters, qigong as a modern incarnation of the old longevity tradition, is, in general, conceived as a practice leading to maintaining health and the recovery of health for subjects with health issues. The motivations for attending the six healing sounds course, in a way, seemed to be very similar to the reasons for which Chinese people visit their parks early in the morning to practice qigong with others. Qigong “offered individuals the opportunity to engage in mind-body cultivation and healing,” says Nancy Chen when describing qigong as practiced in parks across China. Then adds, “Through breathing exercises and visualization of qi … qigong not only offered pleasurable somatic experiences but also generated new breathing spaces that transformed the contours of daily life.”359 We should have no reason to believe that it would be any different, at least in this respect, for Americans here in the United States, although the setting may differ from the popular one conducted in the parks of China and attended by thousands or more at a time.

The manner in which Turner presents the idea of “communitas” involves small, traditional and, by and large, stateless communities. In the break down of structure achieved when going through the rites de passage in these societies we find the liminal state in which the positions held in these interim periods fall apart, giving place to the state of ambiguity and unstructure, a “‘moment out of time’ and in and out of secular social structure.”360 The communities dealt with in our work are a different case altogether. The practice in parks in China, for example, has no real social implications aside from the fact that it is an activity shared by its members, but it is not mandated by society, as is the case Turner discusses when expanding on the concept of liminality and communitas. The practice of qigong has no real social repercussions in the sense that Turner discusses. And here there is no “communion of

360 The Ritual Process. Opus cit. 96
equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.”³⁶¹ That type of phenomenon is simply not present. It is possible, nonetheless, to somewhat stretch the notion, and say that the group practicing qigong could experience a sense of communitas, although there is no real change of positions, social rank, etc., no un-structuring to speak of. However, the group could experience a sense of “homogeneity and comradeship,” and I would argue that the bond and sense of unity that a practicing group may experience, albeit not being of a social nature, is more subtle, more rarified and, similarly, also temporary. When practicing qigong, the group may participate in a sense of unified energies, of shared consciousness, as it were, while in the liminal state, and perhaps moments afterwards. Or at least, that is how I would characterize my experience of practicing in a group.

The Liminal State

The practice of qigong entails the entering, into a different realm of things. It is entering into that state of ambiguity and separation from ordinary reality. For this to happen, it is not the everyday mind, the mind that deals with the shopping list, preparing breakfast, or calculating the budget for the next month, that is needed. When practicing qigong, the individual is making a choice, and by doing so, the outer world gets somewhat shut down and the inner landscape, via awareness and imagination, opens up. It is a different world, a world accessible through a shift in our consciousness. Somehow, as soon as we tune into this worldview the body-mind enters into a state of consciousness in which other elements, elements hitherto hidden from view, become real and tangible. The ears “listen inside” to the “sounds” of the body.³⁶² If we think in terms of Mircea Eliade’s ‘sacred’ as opposed to ‘profane,’ time and space; we can say that when one practices qigong we are de facto ‘breaking’ with everyday, ordinary life, and entering into a world of origins, a world of numen

³⁶¹ Ibid
³⁶² Dan Miller and Tim Cartmell. Xing Yi Nei Gong: Xing Yi Health Maintenance and Internal Strength Development. Unique Publications; First Edition edition (October 1998) 70
and myth; we enter into a world of images and bodily awareness, for the world sought with the practice of qigong is realized in the body. There is a break in time, and there is also a break in space, for the body becomes a threshold and the locus of embodied energies, vital forces to bring to consciousness.

The liminal world is not too far away from us humans. We enter it when we sleep and dream, and even when we daydream. The one discussed here, nonetheless, is different. It is a state in which the practitioners enter that “has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.” This is because, in many instances, it is, not only truly ‘other,’ but has the potential of being, in fact, transformative. And that is precisely the aim of practicing qigong. To transform from an unhealthy state to a healthy one, if that is the crisis and solution the individual seeks; to cultivate the life force in a way that it transforms us by becoming aware of more and more subtle states of mind and body. The more serious practitioners perhaps would like to transmute their energies to such a rarified state as to become an embodiment of the Dao, the ultimate reality, a state of transparency to the Dao. This transparency to the Dao is what is named also ‘embodiment’, of the Dao. It is a sublimated state in which the energies in the body are flowing freely, the mind and emotions are now quiet, the orbs alive with transformative vital force. Embodiment, however, is what the practice of qigong or longevity practices aims at, in whatever level of practice. In other words, for healing or health maintenance to be experienced, for example it is the embodiment of the Dao that will, in effect, be the cause and outcome of the practice. Karlfried Graf Von Durkheim, writing about the practice of Hara, that is, of the rooting, or rather, re-rooting, of man’s consciousness in

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364 Victor Turner. *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society (1964). Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, pp. 4-20. Turner further clarifies what he understands by "state" when he says that a state can be “ecological conditions, or to the physical, mental or emotional condition in which a person or group may be found at a particular time.”

365 This state is supposed to be truly other only in the beginning of practice. As the practitioner becomes accustomed to entering such a state through regular practice, it becomes his or her natural mode of being in the world.

366 Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. *Hara, The Vital Center of Man*. George Allen & Unwin; Reprint edition (1985). Hara is the Japanese word for ‘belly,’ in the sense of dantian, as the center of the life force located around the navel. But is also much more. As Graf Durkheim puts it: Hara implies for the Japanese all that he considers
the belly, the fundamental center of vital force and gravity in the body-mind, as in the dantian area, says,

For Hara means nothing but that condition of man in which he is open to the primal Oneness of original life and which he can manifest in his everyday living. Hara is a connecting link between Being beyond space and time, and our existence in space and time. Hara is the germinating centre of that total state of mind in which man, liberated from the despotism of the I, becomes transparent to the creative and liberating influence of Primordial Life whose transcendental unity he shares in his own being.367

The practice of Hara, is, in fact one of the many qigong practices, and another way in which we can understand and practice qigong. The important element that I would like to emphasize here, just to bring to light how even the Japanese Zen tradition, a tradition that is historically the product of much exchange of ideas and practices between Daoists and Buddhists,368 kept the notion and practice of focusing on the lower dantian as a center of consciousness and of primal life force, the realization of such practice resulting in the embodiment of Being, or Dao, beyond the limitations of the ego.

When practicing qigong several elements come into play. The intent to practice qigong, as mentioned above, entails a break with the ordinary, everyday activities; it demands a different use of our mental and bodily faculties. The attention changes from an auto pilot mode of being in which the mind simply functions without much thought on the activities performed into a more focused, meditative state. There is a shift in consciousness. Awareness is now turned within.

essential to man’s character and destiny. Hara is the centre of the human body - but the body, because it is a human body, is more than a merely biological-physiological entity. It is at the same time the centre in a spiritual sense or, to be more accurate, a nature-given spiritual sense.

367 Ibid 49
368 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/
The Chinese have a term to describe this liminal state, the state of the “threshold people,” to quote Turner. In self-cultivation styles, i.e., forms of qigong (gongfa), there is a moment in which the student, most likely, will experience ru jing 入静, the “entering stillness.” This is a very known mind state that the practitioner is expected to experience. The Daoist and longevity practitioners since the beginning of their history have written about the different landmarks, signposts along the way, that can tell the teacher of the progress his students are making. This is one of them. Rujing could also loosely correspond to what Herber Benson has called the “relaxation response,” a term he coined and popularized after years of research. Moreover, he mentions distinctively qigong as one of the practices that can trigger such a bodymind state. For our purposes, it is important to mention rujing, since it is this state that is mentioned specifically within the tradition to describe that liminal condition of transition from the ‘normal’ state of being in the world, to an inner and yet bodily consciousness attested through the ages as a signpost of well directed practice. The slow, silk-like movements of qigong or Taiji, as well as most forms of meditation can trigger this state. In qigong, by shifting our awareness to the inner organs, the different dantian or energy centers, we enter into this state, that threshold, state of mind and body. We will now examine the characteristics of visualization in the Daoist tradition.

Visualization

The act of imagining that the inside of the body is the dwelling place of a variety of different energies and forces is also part and parcel of the practice of qigong. Moreover it is also an ability to “enter into what gives one access to an intermediary world between the realm

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369 Dan Miller and Tim Cartmell. Xing Yi Nei Gong: Xing Yi Health Maintenance and Internal Strength Development. Opus cit. 66
of unfathomable and hidden mystery and the world of sensible and gross forms.” The act of visualizing, then, is at the heart of the entering into the liminal state. Isabelle Robinet in a very enlightening passage seems to afford us a good explanation of the function and aims of the varied visualization techniques used in some, if not most Daoist schools. 371 Her comments are worth quoting at length.

Concerning the "psycho-cosmic" function of the imagination, Corbin says that the cosmological and psychological aspects are inseparable and complementary. It is a function or faculty that gives one access to an intermediary world between the realm of unfathomable and hidden mystery and the world of sensible and gross forms. It allows the mystic to grasp the subtle forms of the visible objects he is concentrating on. Thus, the adept perceives bodily organs, terrestrial mountains, or stars in the form of effluvia, efflorescences (hua), essences (ching), breaths (ch’i), or luminous clouds. These are, as the Taoists say, "images" (hsiang) the "true" or invisible form whose visible aspect is only a sign or a "trace."

This world of images is located between the world of sensory realities and the world of the unknowable. The unknowable realm, which the Taoists call the Void, can only be rendered by means of a double negation. Since this world of absolute Truth cannot be directly grasped, it can only be approached through intermediary forms that are recognized as such. Whereas the method of apophasic negation uses concepts only to repeatedly reject them as inadequate and finite, the method of visual meditation makes use of analogical knowledge. It works with visual symbols and signs which the adept tries to evoke, perceive, and decipher. The great metaphysical and ontological questions the relation of the Same to the Other, the One to the Many; or the creation of the world are all treated in relation to images. Through concrete and scenic visions, visual meditation makes the adept aware of what metaphysics expresses only in dialectical and discursive language. 372

The visualizing of the internal body with its energy pathways and vortexes of energy/consciousness such as the three dantians, the bahui point on the top of the head, for example, brings something alive, something that hitherto has remained hidden or inactive, is

371 Isabelle Robinet Taoist Meditation. The Maoshan Tradition of Great Purity. p50. Although she is treating in extenso the practices of the Maoshan or Shangqing School, we can safely assume that her comments apply to visualization in Daoism and other traditions at large. 372 Ibid
now bubbly and in motion. It is the yi 意, mind-intent, in tandem with visualization that brings about the plunging into the liminal state. Through this mental focus and activity one is able to access the subtle world, or subtle body, of energies and consciousness. Sometimes the yi goes inward, looking, ‘seeing’ or feeling, the bodily entrails, and the intricacies of energetic life within the body. At other times the mind is directed outside the body, like when Dr Zhang would tell us to breath out bad or sick qi through the toes, forcefully, while visualizing it leaving the body, unshapely dark and foggy.

In other qigong exercises one is to imagine the arms extending infinitely in front, reaching the confines of the universe. Having this feeling one visualizes pulling-in healing energy into the body. In another ‘exercise’ the student imagines his body growing in size, gradually encompassing the room one is in or the park, then the neighborhood, then the city, the providence, the country the planet, etc until he or she has become the universe.

Thus, this very salient aspect of qigong practice is put into a much clearer perspective. Through visual meditations, and there are an almost infinite amount of them, the other world of “unfathomable and hidden mystery” is accessed.

It is the actualizing or realizing this other ‘world’ that we will discuss next, when we treat the idea of embodiment.

**Embodiment**

The Chinese notion of truth as embodied, of the inseparability of knowledge and action, of the Way as not only the highest truth but also a way of life or an art of living, struck a deep resonant chord in me as a Christian and as a woman.373

The idea of embodiment has been indeed somewhat foreign to western thought, at least until recently. It would take us astray discussing this point here, so let us say only that the

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Christian idea of god incarnate in Christ is the closest it comes to this notion of divine embodiment. However, for the Daoists (and Indians) this idea is expanded to an ideal that anyone is, potentially, able to achieve.

Embodiment is already akin to an immanent reality in the Daoist universe. There is transcendence to be sure, but it is rooted in the notion of a nature that already partakes in the same essence, same life. Dao manifests as the world, and it never ceases to be Dao. Its energies animate the whole universe, in whatever shape or form, in whatever kind of life we may or may not perceive, from the subtle to the gross. In the same way, in a real sense, spirit (and mind) resides in the body, the whole of it. The bones and the physical shape of the body are the original residence of life. The energy is the life force that fills these. The spirit is the force which controls this energy. (1.15b)

The term spirit here is conjectured to mean the various mental functions such as will and intention. The spirit flows throughout the body. That “the spirit rules” means that the spirit is present within the energy and in conjunction with it permeates the whole body. The mind, then, is not limited to the organs. It flows throughout the body and in a way we could say that homeostasis here has a teleological aspect to its workings since it keeps everything going as smoothly as it possibly can. The “mind acts on its own accord and on its own behalf.”

Moreover, when the body is filled with qi, it means that the mind is everywhere in the body at the same time. When the mind is everywhere, as opposed to concentrated at times in the different places it needs to be to perceive sensory input, it is said to be pure awareness. “When the body is filled with energies, the mind must be present in every place at the same time. This, in turn, means that every tiny and remote part of the body is filled with awareness,

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375 It is worth noting that the work of neuroscientist Candace Perth, especially her Molecules of Emotion, The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine. Simon & Schuster; 1 edition (February 17, 1999), points in the same direction: the mind is not located only in the head or wherever neurons are concentrated, but it flows throughout the body.
377 Ibid
378 Ibid
379 Ibid
and the movements and actions of the body are coordinated to perfection.\textsuperscript{380} It is said as well that in this state the qi also is flowing freely, and the mind has reached a state of tranquil awareness. Both these factors are inseparable. The mind quiets down and the energies flow freely and harmoniously. By letting the qi flow freely the mind comes to rest. Hence the persistent emphasis in Daoist practices in general on relaxation or song 鬆; the correct translation is rather of a relaxed state in which the muscles are “neither slack or tense.” When applied to the mind the Chinese prefer the term jing 靜, calm or tranquil awareness. \textsuperscript{381}

The state of embodiment is something that can be acquired through the practice of xiu yang (修養), self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is the constant entering into the liminal state of consciousness, state that is ultimately, transforming. Xiu yang means to arrange, to smooth down, any roughness or irregularities by repeating an action many times in harmony with the cosmic order, until perfection is achieved. The perfect and complete body is thereby nurtured, its energies strengthened; it thus becomes totally integrated into the natural and cosmic environment. From there, the way is led – by repeated, cyclical movements – to spontaneity, which is the essence of the Tao (Dao).\textsuperscript{382} Some qigong and Taiji teachers, such as Fong Ha, for example, insist that the practice leads to, more than anything else, “unlearning bad postural and movement habits.” So, rather than filling the body and mind with more ‘stuff’, the opposite is what is required, in order to manifest transparency and spontaneity: emptying the body-mind of learned behaviors and habits that truncate the spontaneous manifestation of Dao.

The state of embodiment, then, is a state of total spontaneity, i.e., of transparency to the Dao, of total Being. The spirit in the body as a reflection of the way, is unobstructed by the limiting biological or psychological factors that everyone else is subject to. The biological or psychological factors do not go away, rather, Dao, spirit, or whatever term we chose to describe it, manifests through them, through the body and mind. This state is borne out of practice, of constant repetition, of a continual self-cultivation, a relentless entering into the liminal state

\textsuperscript{380} Idemi Ishida. \textit{Opus cit.} 57
\textsuperscript{381} Dan Miller and Tim Cartmell. \textit{Xing Yi Nei Gong: Xing Yi Health Maintenance and Internal Strength Development}. Unique Publications; First Edition edition (October 1998) 63
\textsuperscript{382} Kristofer Schipper. \textit{The Taoist Body}. University of California Press (March 19, 1994). 42
until that state of transformation becomes permanent. The emphasis of Daoist practices is on constant cultivation, rather than having an overwhelming, ineffable religious experience, visions of the divine etc., which are passing; is of transformation of body and mind until one becomes the Dao within a frame of moral precepts that would be meaningless if the transformation were not an inner occurrence.  

The Chinese mystical experience of oneness with the Dao is astounding only in the beginning. It represents a way of being in the world completely different from ordinary perception, sensually and intellectually determined. The longer the Daoist lives with the experience the deeper he integrates it into his life and being, the less relevant it is.  

The experience, we must underscore, is that of the bodymind. Thus the body is for Daoists and Chinese medical practitioners the centerpiece of *qigong* practices. The body and mind are not seen as opposites, although they are clearly distinguished. They are rather two aspects of an entire body-spirit continuum. Embodying these energies, that is, becoming aware of their existence and dynamic processes in the body, until they become a part of everyday experience, is the way to perfect the state of transparency to the Dao. The goal can be small or large, but whatever it is, it is the embodying of these qualities that will effect transformation in any way we sought to experience it.

**Liminality, Embodiment and Transformation**

In this last chapter we revisit briefly, and recap, the events that took place in that *qigong* course in which I, and other students participated, as described in detail in chapter one. Regardless of the motivations for their attendance, the event is reminiscent of a modern hybrid ritual of sorts in which the participants, engaging in movements and ‘meditations,’ and sharing several core ideas and beliefs, enter into a liminal state that is conducive, though not

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384 Ibid
385 Ibid
guaranteed, to the experiences and results they seek; by ‘result’ it was usually, albeit tacitly, defined as transformation. This latter concept may be taken as psychological states, spiritual experiences, and most importantly, all underlying the concept of healing. The term ‘healing’ here will be understood in its largest sense possible, something that can range from relieve from stress or minor maladies, and aches, to the therapeutic effects of qigong on more serious life threatening diseases. Sometimes curing is not possible. This is something that Dr Zhang addressed at some point. However, he did talk about the help one can provide with the use of qi to someone that is dying. An older person had been in the throes of death for a few days, he said, but despite the seriousness of his condition he could not die. Dr Zhang was called in to help. He performed qigong on him, a laying on of hands type of therapy, and the next day the person passed away. Dr Zhang said that his qi was so weak and chaotic, that he could not even die. His job was to supply and smooth out some qi for him so he could actually pass away.

In terms of healing, it would be naïve to think that qigong is not consistently helpful. Throughout the ages the numbers of people, even if the numbers and stories are anecdotal, are too many to ignore; hence the popularity of qigong. Even westerners that have no prior knowledge of this energy practice are, more often than not, blown away by the experience and furthermore by its effectiveness.

The Group

So here was a group of about fifteen Americans or so, mostly adults, from young to middle age Caucasians, in Los Angeles, California, learning an ancient, though revamped, Chinese healing and spiritual art form from a Chinese master that is also a pediatrician. Some of them are students of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) at the school where the event takes place a couple of times a week; others are people from different walks of life. It is assumed that most are familiar with the notions of qi, energy channels, yin/yang, acupuncture points, the five phases or elements etc., in sum the basic notions of Traditional Chinese Medicine as described at the beginning of this section. The participants took part for various
reasons, ranging from spiritual nourishment to health crisis; some of the participants expressed their dissatisfaction or outright discontent with the healthcare system, not only from a monetary standpoint but they were also in great doubt as to the effectiveness of western medicine in treating many, if not most, of the chronic diseases that plague our modern life. A few of the students are familiar with Dr Zhang, having previously studied with him other qigong courses he taught or some had been, or were patients of his. Most likely few if any, know each others’ religious or spiritual leanings but it is also assumed that even if they did originally belong to a well-defined traditional religious group, they had no problem accepting and participating in an event considered somewhat “new agey”. This gathering of people came together to practice qigong, that is, a group performance of ritualized movements in which its members enter into a liminal state, a trance state, or an alternate state of consciousness (ASC).

A Ritual of Sorts

The atmosphere becomes quiet and to a certain degree, “charged”. Everyone is standing, eyes closed, ‘looking’ inside and ‘hearing’ the sounds of the body. It is in this liminal state that the practitioner can experience the inner world, that alternate state of consciousness, the side effects of which are usually conducive to experiencing spiritual wellbeing as well as healing of physical or emotional afflictions. This is close to what Fishman calls the “transmigration experience,” which he defines as the “process of migrating from the earth plane to a point within which one can personally experience the spiritual planes.” Spiritual planes in this qigong setting will be understood as ASC and for us, the various manifestations of qi in the body-mind continuum. This narrower definition, however, does not preclude individuals from experiencing the numinous in more ‘familiar’ or traditional forms, that is, having visions, encounters with spiritual entities, ecstatic states etc. Thus, we see in the qigong experience a stepping into the threshold of consciousness, a liminal state, into

Fishman’s transmigration state. It is in this state that the refinement of one’s energies takes
place. Entering into the threshold allows for the qi to move in every which way, to find its own
natural path or paths, to unblock where there has been an obstruction. We place the attention
on the navel area; then between the navel and the spine, and it feels eerily comfortable. A
moment ago this was just the belly, my stomach, the place where food is digested. Now it
seems to come alive with new sensations. And, more importantly, a new sense of peace arises
from doing so.

The movements are slow, some are spontaneous, some learned for the first time, on the
spot. They are different, though. They look strange; no one unfamiliar with Taiji would be able
to identify what is going on. I am very familiar to the reactions of people looking at someone
performing such exercises in a public park. Nowadays this is not that strange, but forty years
ago, it was. But now, we were all performing the movements in unison, to the best of our
ability. “Let’s do the bear movement”, or “move like a bird flapping its wings rapidly,” etc. Then
come the internal visualizations. “Raise your hands, focus on the baihui point on the top of the
head.” There is a tingling sensation, at least for me. Lower your hands, focus on the huiyin, the
area on the pelvic floor, and so forth. The air is more charged. We spend... half an hour? One
hour? It is hard to say. Time seems to come to a standstill. There is this humming feeling in the
body. As if it were buzzing, inside. The whole body seems to vibrate ever so slightly. One is
definitely transported to a different world. The liminal state, the betwixt and between, a state
that is neither here nor there, is the state that the practitioner wants to cultivate. As he or she
does, it becomes more and more a natural state, a condition in which the bodily energies
become increasingly rarified into more and more subtle qualities.

Qigong can and is practiced individually. The atmosphere reached in group practice is
different, though. In the Zen tradition, a practice that shares many things in common with
qigong, they usually exhort the meditators to take advantage of the great opportunity to
practice in a large group. They compare the group to a fire in which each meditator is a log
thrown into it. The larger the group, they say, the larger the fire. What this means is that the
larger the fire, the more energy is there available for everyone to experience transformation of
some kind. According to my experience, this seems to be true. The getting together of a group
of people with a focus intention and synchronized movements and mental images has most
definitely a strong effect on the immediate environment and psychological states.

The Liminal State

We have examined the liminal state in some detail. We know that most people in the
group have a very good idea of the major tenets of Daoism and TCM. They certainly are
acquainted with the notion of qi, yin and yang, the five elements, etc. The collective practice of
qi gong has some promise in store for those who participate. The expectations are of ‘healing’,
of relief from the relentless and almost unavoidable stress of our times. A respite of relaxation,
of letting go, of feeling alive once more, of bringing back the colors that life used to be filled
with (quite literally) from the current grayish hue that has become the daily prism through
which everything is seeing. This atmosphere does not require any further explanation or
confirmation. It is palpable. It is insinuated, subtly hinted at. There is some healing to
experience; this term has to be taken in its widest sense. The overloading of the nervous system
simply does not allow the spirit to come through. It needs to be cleansed, shaken off, so that
spirit, can, once more shine through. People, of course, also hope to feel relief from pain and
aches. To my knowledge no one there has a so-called terminal illness. That is what qigong is for
after all. Healing. Healing of some so many conditions; from a headache to the more serous, life
threatening illnesses. How it does it is the more attractive aspect of qigong. It does not use
western drugs, or even acupuncture, although many use it in tandem with the practice,. It is a
therapy that does not need anything else but an individual willing to believe in the power of its
own body to heal itself. By doing certain movements and visualization, by sitting quietly and
focusing on the breath, and by bringing the attention to different areas of the body, healing
may be elicited.

We have all gone through separation. We all want to go to a different ‘place’. We had
already gone into the room, the first step in extracting ourselves from the daily occurrences.
Although a completely secular, even scientific type of activity, it was also acknowledged as being potentially symbolic and charged with expectations of ‘otherworldliness’.

We all go through the liminal state while practicing qigong, by doing the movements, by sitting quietly and imagining the organs in different colors, energies circulating in the channels within the body, sometimes reaching out, sometimes energies coming in from the environment or more distant places, a tree, a mountain. Space and time do not have the same connotation when practicing. It is a nonlocal universe\(^\text{387}\) in which here and there make no sense. Everything is everywhere, and we can be anywhere only by intending it, be it in the body or on a star. We can call the help of a body of water or the memory of a benign powerful figure. Dr Zhang would say to call on him if we needed some energy. Or call someone else one thought would be able to help. All these symbols, images, even short stories, become alive in the xin，心，the heart-mind (for the Chinese the heart is the mind). The body is the universe. In this liminal state, energies grow inside, the flow becomes steady and blocks are dissolved. By entering this state, the Dao becomes more of a lived experience; transformation in the form of healing or any other manifestation of the Dao is possible.

Reaggregation comes after the last sitting exercise has come to an end. We would all sit there quietly, eyes still closed for a few more minutes. We have to prepare to receive outer input. Physically the eyes would heart if we just opened them. We start wiggling fingers and toes; moving limbs, slowly. Then neck and head. After opening the eyes it would still be a few more moments before we would ‘come down’. And then when leaving the room we have completed the reaggregation phase. We are back in the world, the normal world of beta brain waves, of walking, and driving and eating. Something has happened but I cannot say what it is. I feel peaceful, for certain. Do not want to talk, as if the words coming out of my mind would disturb the peace I feel. The body feels light and connected; feels integrated. Every night after class I sleep particularly well. Every time we attended class there was a magical energy

\(^{387}\) Larry Dossey MD, has written in extenso on this concept. He considers it crucial for an understanding of how spirit works in healing. See, for example, Reinventing Medicine: Beyond Mind-Body to a New Era of Healing. HarperOne; 1 edition (September 5, 2000)
circulating in the room, and then in our bodies. Something happens but it is difficult to pinpoint. The transformation is subtle. But I get the idea: qigong I definitely effective. And like the Daoists usually recommend, repetition is crucial. Everyday practice is what brings about lasting change, that transparency to the Dao we have spoken so much about.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Summary

It is my hope that I have given answers to the inquiries I set out to explore. We began by describing my recollections of a four-week Six Healing Sounds course I attended in 1991, in Los Angeles, California taught by Dr Zhang. Out of this ethnographic piece we began the process of unpacking the questions that, years later, sprang from that experience, questions I tried to answer in this dissertation. The different movements and sitting visualizations and images took me into different states of mind that I found akin to alternate states of consciousness. The first one was a simple, what happened here? How did I, and I am sure others as well, were able to plunge into such different states of mind? How does this happen? What is qigong? What are the six healing sounds? How do they fit within the qigong tradition? What are its basic premises? I argued that qigong is a practice that elicits a liminal state, and that liminal, threshold state of mind, is conducive to healing and transformation; moreover, that this liminal state is the requisite for the embodiment of energies and consciousness that make transformation possible.

After describing the ethnographic piece we looked into the nature of qigong, its history, ancient and recent, and, we made clear where the six healing sounds tradition fits within the larger Daoyin/qigong lore.

Qigong, then, can be traced to, first shamanism, then to the ancient practices of Daoyin that most likely derived from the latter: daoyin is the Longevity tradition par excellence, which earliest references take us back to the writings of Zhuangzi in the fourth century B.C.E., and the findings of Mawangdui from the second century BCE. Others seem to point to much earlier dates and are associated with old mythical figures such as Yu (as in the Pace(s) of Yu), and Master Redpine to name just two. The fangshi, the “recipe gentlemen” were that class of persons who dedicated their lives to the collection and sharing of wisdom, through “recipes” or
writings, philosophical, mystical, medical, with the wider community. They were the ones that most likely were involved in the dissemination of the manuscripts revealed at the cache at Mawangdui. In the fourth or third century BCE, the acquisition of such material was done at relatively high cost and would require a wealthy, aristocratic class that was interested in such subjects to hire scribes, a very expensive service to be sure, to copy the manuscripts. After all, only the wealthy elite could afford and dedicate time to keeping fit and healthy, aside from educating themselves on other subjects as well. The hiring of traveling fangshi acquainted with such practices, steeped in the burgeoning Daoist ideas, and who would impart knowledge of this kind was the likely scenario. At least those are some of the conclusions we can arrive from the Mawangdui findings of 1973. These early Daoists and medical practitioners apparently shared most of the knowledge on longevity practices, including the budding theories circulating at the time of the different essentials being elaborated and speculated upon. Thus came about notions of qi, of Dao, yin and yang, and the five elements among others. At this time we do not see any of the claims to lineages and secrecy of recipes and practices we come across later in the history of Daoist and medical practices.

We explored the textual tradition and the writings most relevant to our topic at hand. After that we described the history of the six healing breaths and were able to put that practice squarely within the larger ‘qigong’ or rather, longevity, tradition. We were also able to discern Master Ni’s and the yellow court traditions as the closest approximation to the styles of the six healing sounds taught in modern times and especially by Dr Zhang.

The recent history of qigong was definitely the most surprising finding. We discovered that the ‘qigong’ tradition was, very literally, an invented tradition, ‘created’ for its low cost and the health benefits it could bestow upon the Chinese people. We were able to find that the Chinese Communist Party had to excise all the ‘feudal and superstitious’ elements it had come with from ancient times, and transform it into a twentieth century science in order to accept it as a viable and necessary alternative to western medicine, at least until more Western trained doctors could be produced. The qigong movement rose to incredible popularity, something that had never happened before in the history of China, since the longevity and Daoist practices had always been the purview of a few select practitioners as well as the Daoist monks confined to
mountains or otherwise reclusive living. However, many teachers rose to popularity and even stardom in the 80’s and 90’s, what was called the “qigong boom” or the “qigong fever”. After a series of events that put qigong in the spotlight but in a negative light this time, especially because of the “qigong deviations,” that is, the negative effects that qigong can trigger, such as exacerbation of psychotic episodes among other things, and the rise of the enemies of qigong, who still considered it nothing but a remnant of ‘feudal and superstitious’ beliefs; to top it all off, the Falun Gong debacle ensued affecting all of the qigong milieu. An era of suppression and punishment for the Falun Gong practitioners followed, repression that lasts to this day.

After we had placed the longevity tradition in its historical perspective we looked into the world of liminality and embodiment, perhaps two of the most relevant aspects of the practice of qigong. Liminal practice means that there would be, through yi, movements and visualizations, whether sitting or standing, elicitation of alternate states of consciousness conducive to healing and transformation.

Liminality and Embodiment

Exploring the healing, perhaps the most salient aspect of qigong, we delved into how healing, one transformative aspect, is elicited. Victor Turner’s ideas on liminality helped us come to an understanding of how the practice of qigong brings the practitioner to the threshold, a mental or spiritual state of ambiguity and marginality, the door that takes him or her to the world of embodiment and transformation. This state does not have to be a deep trance, although it can definitely take the practitioner there. The simple outlook, the Daoist weltanschauung, sustained in the mind, the images and visualizations evoked are the essential ingredients of a state of reverie. Liminality is, in this context, that state of body and mind, that experience of entering that alternate state of consciousness, the state of the ‘ambiguous traveler,’ a state that is neither here nor there, however subtle or perceptible it may be, that allows the practitioner to pass on to that other ‘world.’ The Chinese practitioners have called this “ru jing,” entering stillness. Qigong is what elicits such alternate state of consciousness; the
slow movements, bringing awareness to different parts of the body, the attention paid by the ears ‘listening’ to the ‘sounds’ of the body. Qigong creates that liminal atmosphere without and within. When treating or discussing the outer aspects of the liminal state, it is called the “qi field.” Thus, a group of people getting together and practicing qigong i.e., unifying their yi, mind-intent, will, with almost no exception, generate this ‘qi field.’ This group energy, an energy that is also consciousness, definitely supports the entering into the liminal state. At times, the mind intent or yi is the tool used to get into this state. However, there are some qigong exercises that do not require yi, and still are able to bring about that state of mind. One very popular practice is called “standing like a tree” or “standing pole.” Standing with shoulder width apart, arms raised in front as if hugging a tree, not thinking on anything in particular. Master Fong Ha, a famous Taiji master based in Berkeley, CA, and whom I visited in the early 90’s would say, “This is how we do nothing and accomplish everything”. In my experience ru jing is experienced spontaneously when doing this type of practice, although there is no conscious intent to “do” anything. Also worth mentioning is the fact that a few minutes of practice have not only a transformative effect, but it also lasts for a considerable number of hours after one is done with the exercises. What that means is that a half hour or one hour of qigong practice will leave the person feeling calmed and centered, relaxed, yet focused, and that this state, if practiced consistently becomes the natural state of mind and body. This is the state of embodiment, something that becomes part of the practitioner’s personality and character.

Qigong also works with images and visualization. Many images are taught in this regard. “Imagine a tranquil lake while putting your attention there (body part),” I have heard from qigong instructors. “Extend your arms infinitely in front of you, to the end of the universe,” or “Think that you are a ball, a ball of qi.” “Imagine that your body is the universe, infinite.” In my experience these images have a tremendous effect on the psyche and body. Once, many years ago, when I was in my mid twenties, I was discussing the I Ching, the famous Book of Changes, an oracle and Chinese book of wisdom and guidance, with a friend of mine. I brought up in conversation hexagram number 52, Keeping Still, The Mountain. I had asked the I Ching a few times something at that particular juncture in my life and this hexagram kept coming up. Its
message was uplifting and full of hope. The image and message was of calm and inner peace coming ahead. I talked with my friend about this hexagram and how true its message was, since that was exactly my overall feeling during the next few months, after my inquiries. We talked about the image of the mountain being so powerful. Sometime later my friend told me that while he was going through some turmoil he had evoked the image of that peaceful mountain from the *I Ching* we had talked about. He went on to say,

> Whenever I was going through a bad patch or having arguments or conflicts in my life, as one often does, all I had to do was to bring that image to mind. When I did, I immediately felt grounded and stable. My body felt a rooted in the earth; I had no idea I could experience such a palpable body sensation. I felt very solid, strong and peaceful almost immediately, and whatever was happening ‘out there’ in life did not affect me as much.

The very Daoist notion of embodiment afforded us an appreciation of how the longevity exercises affect and shape change in the body-mind system. This is no ordinary change, however. By entering into the liminal state the practitioner gets closer and closer to being Dao. The body is the Dao and a vessel through which the *Way* can come through, hence the notion of *transparency*, so lucidly expressed by Karlfried Graf Durkheim. Nonetheless, since everything is Dao, the body, nature, the world, are at the same time immanent and transcendent. They differ in degrees of solidity or subtleness, depending on how we want to look at it. Truth is the Dao. Embodiment means that knowledge is not an intellectual activity only. That, of course, can and may be an aspect of a deeper understanding, as well; it is knowledge that lives and finds its expression in the entirety of being. There is no ‘thinking’ of goodness and an action that is not goodness. Body and mind are unified in thought and action, without any separation, without dichotomy of body and mind.

Body and mind are aspects of the Dao, and expressions of *qi*, the universal, most palpable manifestation of the Dao. The Way (Dao), therefore, through constant practice, manifests more and more in the body. Action in this state of being is in harmony with the ultimate reality. The new consciousness lives in the body, and as a consequence whatever action is taken is the correct action. There is no wrong action, no contradiction, no conflict, since the action of a thus embodied being is *wuwei*, non-action. Mind and body act in a unified,
effortless manner. “...[S]elf-cultivation though maximizing the natural expression of de, perfecting embodied energy as qi, and co-relating health in body to proper function in society, nature, and Tian.” 388

Livia Kohn also explains the transformative experience of the Dao thus, “Adepts transform who they are as persons to become one with the Dao, but they do not do it merely through mental reorientation. Their entire physical structure changes as the powers of the cosmos manifest in them and the Dao takes over their being.” 389

Qigong has, perhaps, a less lofty goal or ideal in mind than ‘total’ union with the Dao, of total transformation and immortality. The intention is of healing. However, the same principles of embodiment and transformation must manifest in the body-mind for healing to occur.

The Future of Qigong

The history of qigong started for me when I took the courses Dr Zhang offered in the early 90’s. It is from those offerings that sprang the questions for this dissertation. The most recent history is, of course, what is happening nowadays with qigong. How the west has received this ancient practice, and how it is transforming it.

There are some elements that come with the practice that are not part of this culture. The practice of qigong requires repetitive and consistent effort; however, this “effort” is realized as “cultivation”. This term has a very different connotation from effort. Effort connotes forcefulness, whereas cultivation is dedication that nourishes. In the west we tend to think of effort towards a goal, even if that effort comes at great cost, i.e., burnout, exhaustion or worse. Only when we understand this notion of “cultivation” our practice will bring as a result different degrees of embodiment. Once when I was discussing Daoism and qigong with a Chinese


professor, she told me, “in America there is no notion of nourishing, of resting or letting the body and spirit recover the energies spent from the constant going and going.” I had to agree. On the one hand we understand that we have to work hard to make a living, but when it comes to nourishing the spirit, there is no reference point for that.

When I was giving a qigong workshop in Germany a few years ago, one of the ladies taking the course asked when we were having a lunch break: “how often do I need to practice?” My response was, “well if you practice once a week, you will get once a week results”. She, and the other students laughed, seemingly understanding what I had tried to convey. One will get out (of the practice), almost without fail, whatever we put in. Of course different factors play a role in the effectiveness of the practice: a good teacher, correct practice, the opportunity to dedicate it enough time for it to make a difference, state of health, and other imponderables, all play a part. However, constant practice should be considered the top reason for effective practice. And by effective praxis we mean, recovery of health, health maintenance or balancing of extreme emotional states into a state of well-being. Effectiveness, however, comes from the notion of spirit shining through. Of embodying those energies.

One of the last things I did when finishing up this draft was to do a quick search punching into Google the word “qigong”. I received “10,400,000 and more” hits. Yes that is over ten million hits. The proliferation of this ancient practice is truly astounding, although nothing compared to the results one gets when doing a search for yoga. A “yoga” search gave 467,000,000. Perhaps one of the reasons for this difference is the obsession of Americans with exercise and “fitness” for sure. After all, it is a multibillion-dollar industry. Most yoga as it is practiced today seems to be more than anything else a water down version of some type of aerobic exercise.

Qigong, on the other hand, is a different approach to “exercise,” and anyone looking at a group of people doing Taiji or Qigong would probably think that it is too slow and boring and assume, very incorrectly, that it is not a real challenge. Qigong has the advantage of being a very subtle type of spiritual practice. It is what the Chinese call “dual practice.” One exercises the body while, at the same time, cultivating the spirit. So people disenchanted with their traditional religious backgrounds and even more so with the health care system, flock with
alacrity to qigong courses. It is, as Palmer calls it, a “body-centered religiosity,” that many find alluring. It is empty of images that can be traced back to any religion, Daoist, Buddhist or whatever, although a few teachers do share stories and/or images with some Daoist or Buddhist overtones. Instead, spiritual power is described in terms of qi, awareness, or consciousness; the “universe” is the impersonal idea of divinity without it being tainted by any religious images. All of us, however, bring our own bundle of images and mythologies to the practice, whether conscious of it or not. The need to personify or otherwise project images and stories to the practice seems a universal impulse, and we might add, often helpful.

The image of water is often evoked or otherwise called as a desirable state of mind. There is always an emphasis on being a gentle with oneself, never forcing things, giving time for qi to work through the different blocks and disharmonies. Water flows through difficulties and obstacles unabated, resting and filling empty spaces. The image brings relaxed, natural flow, to let the mind calm down, which calms the body. Relaxation is always brought up as the main aspect of the practice, and of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as well. After all, in TCM the main cause of qi disruptions leading to chronic dis-ease are the seven emotions as they relate to organ function: anger, fear and shock, sadness, over-joy, worry, and depression. All these emotions work against relaxation, for sure. Song, ‘relaxation,’ is triggered when entering the liminal state, when entering stillness (rujing). It is also triggered when a person is receiving acupuncture.

Since in America and the West in general, we have several practices that have been imported and taken root in our culture from East and Southeast Asia, yoga, qigong, Taiji, reiki, for example, plus the many others that use similar ideas, but as sprang as western models, such as energy medicine, the (Moshe) Feldenkrais (1904–1984) movement method, John Pierrakos (1921-2001), Core Energetics, Thomas Hanna (1928–1990) and his Hanna Somatic Education, etc. There are more schools of this kind that, for the most part, bear similarities to Daoyin; they advocate a holistic and energy/consciousness view of the body and life.

Perhaps one of the reasons why qigong became such a fever in the China of the early 70’s all the way through the late 90’s, and I think it still is, although the Chinese government does not promote the spread of the practice as it did in the early days, is due to the pervading mythologies from which Chinese culture has nurtured the imagination from ancient times. Qigong, inner cultivation, longevity techniques, the notion of qi, of the Daoist immortals, of sages flying in the air, and of all kinds of spiritual visions and powers, simply took a hold of the collective consciousness of the people. These are stories with which most Chinese were (and are) well acquainted and, after going through desperate, traumatic times, such as the taking over of the country by People’s Republic Of China, trying times to say the least, and the even more disastrous and lethal events that claimed the lives of millions, that is, the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution left in their wake, a dosage of spirit and hope was the right prescription for a hope and spirit starved people. Through these body technologies common folk could hope to “harness the powers of the human mind,” and also reach a modicum of inner peace.

Such atmosphere was to create the ideal grounds for a reencounter with the old wisdom handed down in the stories that were part and parcel of Chinese culture. “Practitioners plunged into the legends and symbols of Buddhist magicians and Taoist immortals, dabbled in talismans and divination, and often experienced, through trance states, visions of popular demon and deities.” These body technologies opened the door for a body-centered religiosity that would spread like wild fire under the guise of “health, sports and science outside the supervision of the religious Affairs.”

The point I am hinting at is that the future of qigong in America will depend on the different stories and mythologies we attach to the practice. In America the practice of a body centered religiosity is a new concept and as far as I can tell, the mythologies that Chinese people attach to the practice will be completely different from the ones we attach to it. It has, thus, the potential of being totally transformed, or at least absorbed into other traditions. I have seen the notion of qi, for example, being co-opted by some in the so-called Celtic Spirituality, or Celtic Shamanism teachings of late, although it is hard to know through

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393 David Palmer. Qigong fever. Opus Cit. 5
394 Ibid
translations of ancient language alone whether that rendition is even approximate. The notion of \textit{qi}, of vital energy, for example, is fascinating and the idea that some of our ancient forefathers entertained such notion is even more enticing; whether this is accurate, it is another matter altogether. \textit{Qigong} also encompasses such vast array of practices that it makes it easy for other traditions to interact with it and interpret their own experiences in terms of \textit{qi}, \textit{yi}, \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}, of movement and visualizations or whatever. Andy Baggott, for example, describes himself as a “Celtic Medicine man,” but one that has studied and incorporated other traditions, such as Native American, Buddhism and Daoism into his modern Celtic healing practice. He writes, “I make no apology for the fact that I have “Celticised” some aspects of Chinese medicine”.\footnote{Andy Baggott. \textit{The Celtic Wheel of Life}. Gateway (April 1, 2001) ix.}

There are so many that feel the same way and have absorbed and adapted other traditions into their own practices. I, for instance, am someone who not only practices and teaches \textit{Taiji} and \textit{qigong}, and is a certified Medical Qigong practitioner, but also is a Hatha yoga instructor, a Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner (currently not practicing), has studied Jungian psychology, Hinduism, Tantra, Zen Buddhism, Neo-Platonism, Native American spirituality and other healing traditions such as Cherokee body work, attends Native American Healing circles, lift weights at the gym, plays tennis, goes fly fishing, meditates, and is a musician and healer. So, I bring quite a few mythologies, legends and stories of my own to my personal interpretation of the ancient art of \textit{qigong}.

I would say that \textit{qigong} is here to stay; is here to be transformed into an American practice with its own set of images, mythologies and stories; these are all going to vary greatly depending on the teachers take on the practice, but the core tenets of \textit{qigong} will, most likely, remain as the underlying and unifying principles that has seen it grow from times immemorial until our modern times. It is a new arrival but it hits the right chords with most people, and as we see the medical system adapt more and more to a growing demand for holistic medical approaches, we will see practices like \textit{qigong} becoming more mainstream and perhaps even incorporated into the medical system, as China has done from the inception of ‘\textit{qigong}” in the early 50’s.
However, whether it goes mainstream or not, it does not matter. There are quite a few practitioners that make a difference in the medical and spiritual field by applying the teachings of “qigong” to health, some brand of spirituality, and well-being.
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