



A Brief History of Qigong

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The history of Chinese Qigong can be roughly divided into four periods. We know little about the first period, which is believed to have begun when the *Yi Jing* or “Book of Changes” was introduced sometime before 1122 B.C., and to have extended until the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) when Buddhism and its meditation methods were imported from India. This infusion brought Qigong practice and meditation into the second period, the Religious Qigong era. This period lasted until the Liang dynasty (502-557 A.D.), when it was discovered that Qigong could be used for martial arts purposes. This was the beginning of the third period, that of Martial Qigong. Many different martial Qigong styles were created based on the theories and principles of Buddhist and Daoist Qigong. This period lasted until the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911; from that point Chinese Qigong training was merged with Qigong practices from India, Japan, and many other countries.

Period I-Scholarly & Medical Qigong: Pre- Han Dynasty (Before 206 B.C.)

The *Yi Jing* “Book of Changes;” 1122 B.C., was the first known Chinese book related to Qi. It introduced the concept of the three “natural energies” or “powers” (San Cai): Tian (Heaven), Di (Earth), and Ren (Man). Studying the relationship of these three natural powers was the first step in the development of Qigong.

In 1766-1154 B.C. (the Shang dynasty), the Chinese capital was located in today's An Yang in Henan province. An archaeological excavation at a late Shang dynasty burial ground called Yin Xu yielded more than 160,000 pieces of turtle shell and animal bone covered with written characters. This writing, called “Jia Gu Wen” (Oracle-Bone Scripture), was the earliest evidence of the Chinese use of the written word. Most of the information recorded was of a religious nature. There was no mention of acupuncture or other medical knowledge, even though it was recorded in the *Nei Jing* that during the reign of the Yellow Emperor (2690-2590 B.C.) Bian Shi (stone probes) were already being used to adjust people's Qi circulation.

During the Zhou dynasty (1122-934 B.C.), Lao Zi (Li Er) mentioned certain breathing techniques in his classic *Dao De Jing* (or Tao Te Ching) or *Classic on the Virtue of the Dao*. He stressed that the way to obtain health was to “concentrate on Qi and achieve softness” (Zhuan Qi Zhi Rou). Later, the “Shi Ji” (the Historical Record) in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (770-221 B.C.) also described more complete methods of breath training.

About 300 B.C. the Daoist philosopher Zhuang Zi described the relationship between health and the breath in his book *Nan Hua Jing*. It states: “The men of old breathed clear down to their heels...” This was not merely a figure of speech, and confirms that a breathing method for Qi circulation was being used by some Daoists at that time. During the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.-220 A.D.) there are several medical references to Qigong in the literature, such as the *Nan Jing* or *Classic on Disorders* by the famous physician Bian Que. It describes using the breathing to increase Qi circulation. *Jin Kui Yao Lue* or *Prescriptions from the Golden Chamber* by Zhang Zhong-Jing discusses the use of breathing and acupuncture to maintain good Qi flow. “Zhou Yi Can Tong Qi: A Comparative Study of the Zhou (dynasty) Book of Changes” by Wei Bo-Yang explains the relationship of human beings to nature's forces and Qi. One can observe from this list that up to this time, almost all of the Qigong publications were written by scholars such as Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, or physicians such as Bian Que and Wei Bo-Yang.

Period II- Religious Qigong: Han Dynasty to the Beginning of the Liang Dynasty (206 B.C.-502 A.D.)

Because many Han emperors were extremely intelligent, the Han dynasty was a glorious and peaceful period. It was during the Eastern Han dynasty (c. 58 A.D.) that Buddhism

was imported to China from India. Because the Han emperor became a devout Buddhist, the religion soon flourished. Many Buddhist meditation and Qigong practices, which had been practiced in India for thousands of years, were absorbed into the Chinese culture. The Buddhist temples taught many Qigong practices, especially the still meditation of Chan (Zen), which marked a new era of Chinese Qigong. Much more in depth Qigong theory and practices, developed in India were brought to China. Unfortunately, since the training was directed at attaining Buddha level, the training practices and theory were recorded in the Buddhist bibles and kept secret. For hundreds of years the religious Qigong training was never taught to laymen. Only in this century has it been available to the general populace.

Not long after Buddhism had been imported into China, a Daoist by the name of Zhang Dao-Ling combined the traditional Daoist principles with Buddhism and created a religion called "Dao Jiao." Many of the meditation methods were a combination of the principles and training methods of both sources. Since Tibet had developed its own branch of Buddhism with its own training system and methods of attaining Buddha level, Tibetan Buddhists were also invited to China to preach. In time, their practices were also absorbed.

It was in this period that the traditional Chinese Qigong practitioners finally had a chance to compare their arts with the religious Qigong practices imported from India. While the scholarly and medical Qigong had been concerned with maintaining and improving health, the newly imported religious Qigong was concerned with far more. Contemporary documents and Qigong styles show clearly that the religious practitioners trained their Qi to a much extensive level, working with many internal functions of the body, and strove to obtain control of their bodies, minds, and spirits with the goal of escaping from the cycle of reincarnation.

While the Qigong practices and meditations were being passed down secretly within the monasteries, traditional scholars and physicians continued their Qigong research. During the Jin dynasty in the 3rd century A.D., a famous physician named Hua Tuo used acupuncture for anesthesia in surgery. The Daoist Jun Qian used the movements of animals to create the Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Sports), which taught people how to increase their Qi circulation through specific movements. Also, in this period a physician named Ge Hong mentioned in his book, *Bao Pu Zi*, using the mind to lead and increase Qi. Sometime in the period of 420 to 581 A.D. Tao Hong-Jing compiled the "Yang Shen Yan Ming Lu" (Records of Nourishing the Body and Extending Life), which showed many Qigong techniques.

Period III- Martial Qigong: The Liang Dynasty to the End of the Qing Dynasty (502-1911 A.D.)

During the Liang Dynasty (502-557 A.D.) the emperor invited a Buddhist monk named Da Mo, who was once an Indian prince, to preach Buddhism in China. The emperor decided he did not like Da Mo's Buddhist theory, so the monk withdrew to the Shaolin Temple. When Da Mo arrived, he saw that the priests were weak and sickly, so he shut himself away to ponder the problem. He emerged after nine years of seclusion and wrote two classics: *Yi Jin Jing* (or *Yi Gin Ching*) or *Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic* and *Xi*

Sui Jing (or Shii Soei Ching) or *Marrow/Brain Washing Classic*. *The Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic* taught the priests how to improve and maintain health and change their physical bodies from weak to strong. *The Marrow/Brain Washing Classic* taught the priests how to use Qi to clean the bone marrow and strengthen the blood and immune system, as well as how to energize the brain and attain Enlightenment. Because the *Marrow/Brain Washing Classic* was harder to understand and practice, the training methods were passed down secretly to only a very few disciples in each generation.

After the priests practiced the Muscle/Tendon Changing exercises, they found that not only did they improve their health, but also greatly increased their strength. When this training was integrated into the martial arts forms, it increased the effectiveness of their techniques. In addition to this martial Qigong training, the Shaolin priests also created five animal styles of Gongfu, which imitated the way different animals fight. The animals imitated were the tiger, leopard, dragon, snake, and crane.

Outside of the monastery, the development of Qigong continued during the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907 A.D.). Chao Yuan-Fang compiled the "Zhu Bing Yuan Hou Lun" (Thesis on the Origins and Symptoms of Various Diseases), which is a veritable encyclopedia of Qigong methods listing 260 different ways of increasing the Qi flow. The "Qian Jin Fang" (Thousand Gold Prescriptions) by Sun Si-Mao described the method of leading Qi, and also described the use of the "Six Sounds." The Buddhists and Daoists had already been using the Six Sounds to regulate Qi in the internal organs for some time. Sun Si-Mao also introduced a massage system called Lao Zi's 49 Massage Techniques. "Wai Tai Mi Yao" (The Extra Important Secret) by Wang Tao discussed the use of breathing and herbal therapies for disorders of Qi circulation.

During the Song, Jin, and Yuan dynasties (960-1368 A.D.), "Yang Shen Jue" (Life Nourishing Secrets) by Zhang An-Dao discussed several Qigong practices. "Ru Men Shi Shi" (The Confucian Point of View) by Zhang Zi-He describes the use of Qigong to cure external injuries such as cuts and sprains. "Lan Shi Mi Cang" (Secret Library of the Orchid Room) by Li Guo describes using Qigong and herbal remedies for internal disorders. "Ge Zhi Yu Lun" (A Further Thesis of Complete Study) by Zhu Dan-Xi provided a theoretical explanation for the use of Qigong in curing disease.

During the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), Chang San-Feng is believed to have created Taijiquan (or Tai Chi Chuan). Taiji followed a different approach in its use of Qigong than did Shaolin. While Shaolin emphasized Wai Dan (External Elixir) Qigong exercises, Taiji emphasized Nei Dan (Internal Elixir) Qigong training.

In 1026 A.D. the famous "brass man," a model of the human body demonstrating key points used in acupuncture, was designed and built by Dr. Wang Wei-Yi. Before that time, the many publications that discussed acupuncture theory, principles, and treatment techniques disagreed with each other, and left many points unclear. When Dr. Wang built his brass man, he also wrote a book called *Tong Ren Yu Xue Zhen Jiu Tu* or *Illustration of the Brass Man Acupuncture and Moxibustion*. He explained the relationship of the 12 organs and the 12 Qi channels, clarified many of the points of confusion, and, for the first time, systematically organized acupuncture theory and principles.

In 1034 A.D. Dr. Wang used acupuncture to cure the emperor Ren Zong. With the support of the emperor, acupuncture flourished. In order to encourage acupuncture medical research, the emperor built a temple to Bian Que, who wrote the *Nan Jing*, and worshiped him as the Ancestor of Acupuncture. Acupuncture technology developed so much that even the Jin race in the distant North requested the brass man and other acupuncture technology as a condition for peace. Between 1102 to 1106 A.D., Dr. Wang dissected the bodies of prisoners and added more information to the *Nan Jing*. His work contributed greatly to the advancement of Qigong and Chinese medicine by giving a clear and systematic idea of the circulation of Qi in the human body.

Later, in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 A.D.), Marshal Yue Fei was credited with creating several internal Qigong exercises and martial arts. It is said that he created the "Eight Pieces of Brocade" to improve the health of his soldiers. He is also known as the creator of the internal martial style "Xing Yi." Eagle style martial artists also claim that Yue Fei was the creator of their style.

From then until the end of the Qing dynasty (1911 A.D.), many other Qigong styles were founded. Some well known styles include Hu Bu Gong (Tiger Step Gong), Shi Er Zhuang (Twelve Postures) and Jiao Hua Gong (Beggar Gong). Also in this period, many documents related to Qigong were published, such as "Bao Shen Mi Yao" (The Secret Important Document of Body Protection) by Cao Yuan-Bai, which described moving and stationary Qigong practices; and "Yang Shen Fu Yu" (Brief Introduction to Nourishing the Body) by Chen Ji Ru, about the three treasures: Jing (essence), Qi (internal energy), and Shen (spirit). Also, "Yi Fan Ji Jie" (The Total Introduction to Medical Prescriptions) by Wang Fan-An reviewed and summarized the previously published materials; and "Nei Gong Tu Shuo" (Illustrated Explanation of Nei Gong) by Wang Zu-Yuan presented the Twelve Pieces of Brocade and explained the idea of combining both moving and stationary Qigong.

A Martial Qigong style, Huo Long Gong (Fire Dragon Gong), was created by the Taiyang martial stylists. In late Ming dynasty (around 1640 A.D. The renowned internal martial art style Ba Gua Zhang (or Ba Kua Chang) or "Eight Trigrams Palm," is believed to have been created by Dong Hai-Chuan late in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.). This style is now gaining in popularity throughout the world. During the Qing dynasty, Tibetan meditation and martial techniques became widespread in China for the first time. This was due to the encouragement and interest of the Manchurian Emperors in the royal palace, as well as others of high rank in society.

Period IV- Modern Qigong: The End of Qing Dynasty to the Present

Before 1911 A.D., Chinese society was very conservative and old-fashioned. Even though China had been expanding its contact with the outside world for the previous hundred years, the outside world had little influence beyond the coastal regions. With the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the founding of the Chinese Republic, the nation began changing as never before. Since this time Qigong practice has entered a new era. Because of the ease of communication in the modern world, Western culture now has a greater influence on the Orient. Many Chinese have opened their minds and changed their traditional ideas, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Various Qigong

styles are now being taught openly, and many formerly secret documents are being published. Modern methods of communication have opened up Qigong to a much wider audience than ever before, and people now have the opportunity to study and understand many different styles. In addition, people are now able to compare Chinese Qigong to similar arts from other countries such as India, Japan, Korea, and the Middle East.

I believe that in the near future Qigong will be considered the most exciting and challenging field of research. It is an ancient science just waiting to be investigated with the help of the new technologies now being developed at an almost explosive rate. Anything we can do to accelerate this research will greatly help humanity to understand and improve itself.

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