

The Map of the Qigong and Tai Chi Universe



by Roger Jahnke, OMD

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*In that state, the miraculous is at hand,
the elixir is spontaneously produced and circulated,
In that state the distance from here to the stars
or to the depths of universe, is not,
and the extent of our brilliant
and profound uniqueness is less than vapor thin.
In that state what could be discovered and known
is not somewhere else.
Can you surrender to what is true?*

- Wu Wei, a student, with appearances here and there in history

Mapping the Qigong and Tai Chi Constellations

The estimated 10,000 forms of Qigong (Chi Kung), including the numerous styles of Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan) captivate us with their names from nature— heaven, earth, and the five elements—fire, earth, wind, water, wood. Some focus on gathering Qi from trees, mountains, rivers and oceans. There are forms named after the legendary immortals and Chinese myths as in Yellow Emperor Qigong or Lao Zi Qigong. Some are based on the insights of modern teachers. While others can be traced back to real people and actual lineages, the beginnings of Qigong are shrouded in the misty veil of prehistory to shamanic Master Yu’s Pace of the Dipper Stars.

Many forms of Qigong, particularly medical Qigong, are very practical and named for their intent , e.g. Vitality Method, Muscle and Tendon Method, Back and Spine Enhancing Method, Cancer Recovery Method. Some Qigong forms are named for cosmic qualities. Many Qigong forms are named Primordial (Wuji) and describe that pristine, primordial state of the universe before the Big Bang, which caused Yin/Yang to arise.

Tai Chi, which translates as the Supreme Ultimate, is an exploration of the harmony and balance of the essential – Yin/Yang — forces of the boundless universe. There are hundreds of forms of Tai Chi alone –Yang style, Wu style, Chen style, Sun style, Guang Ping style, long form and short form. In addition, dozens of variations of Tai Chi Qigong, make the beauty and poetry of Tai Chi more accessible for use as a medical Qigong.

Qigong can be done lying down, sitting, standing and walking. For the very ill or for those who want to broaden their practice to include the moments just before sleep and just after awakening, Qigong can be performed while lying down. This provides a way to do Qigong at times that are typically not devoted to anything else. It also creates a way to extend your practice into directed dreaming as did the famous Daoist Monk Chen Tuan at the Jade Spring Monastery near beautiful Flower Mountain in central China.

The heart of Qigong lies not in the form, but in its essence. The essence of Qigong is the *Qigong state* in which the Qi channels are open and circulating, inner resistance is at a minimum and the mechanism and spirit of your being are operating harmoniously. All the forms are maps to guide the practitioner into this state. The immense diversity and sheer numbers of forms reflects the wide array of theoretical and philosophical backgrounds along with the tastes and preferences of the people who developed them.

Imagine that all Qigong methods are stars scattered throughout the heaven in what at first appears to be a random way. If you look again, over time the random stars appear to cluster together, and the 10,000 forms arrange themselves into constellations. As always in finding and following a path, it is useful to have a map. Whether you practice with friends, begin in a class at your community center, align with a particular teacher who has advanced in Qi cultivation or travel to China to seek the original master teachers, this information will help you to get your bearings and chart your path.

The Kinds of Qigong

The Roots	Legendary or ancient Historic Contemporary
The Tradition	Fitness, Longevity and Prevention Medical Daoist Buddhist Martial
The Body	Lying Down Sitting Standing Walking
The Dynamic	Quiescent Dynamic Vigorous
The Form	Form = specific, directed, formalized No Form = spontaneous, formless, nonspecific, intuitive
The Focus	Internal - Neigong External - Waigong

The Historic Roots of Qigong

- Legendary or ancient
- Historic
- Contemporary

The historic soil into which Qigong extends her roots is deep and rich. Her bountiful Daoist, Buddhist, fitness and longevity, medical and martial traditions arose from ancient legendary

forms and methods, before writing and record keeping began. In *The Pace of Yu*, mentioned earlier, Shaman Yu developed a walking or dancing form to call the benevolent forces of Heaven to Earth by marking the designs of the celestial realms, stars and planets on the ground. Shamanic interpretations of animals and the forces of nature were common to all original cultures. In China, some of these evolved into early Qigong forms. One such form, the Flying Crane Form is very likely associated with shamanic origins and is reputed to have been a form of ritual called the Crane Dance.

In the 4th Century BCE, Zhuang Zi, the famous student of Lao Zi, traces the cultivation practices from his own era to another legendary shaman from ancient time who, as the legend goes, lived to 800 years of age. “To pant, to puff, to hail, to spit out the old breath and draw in the new, practicing bear hangings and bird stretchings, longevity the only concern. Such is the life favored by the scholar who practices Dao Yin, the man who nourishes his body with the hope of living as old as Pengzu.” Zhang Zi uses the earliest name for Qigong, Dao Yin, meaning to guide and direct Qi.

The transition to historic forms of Qigong came with the earliest detailed writings that teach Dao Yin in the Han Dynasty era, 206 BCE - 220 CE. The *Dao Yin Jing*, one of the original Qigong texts, was among the scrolls of the library of Master Ge Hong, a great Qi cultivation master from the 4th century CE. In 1972, one of the most spectacular archeological finds in the historic era of Qigong occurred. In a group of tombs from the Han Dynasty at Ma Wang Dui a silk scroll was discovered with forty detailed figures in an array of Dao Yin postures. This is one of the first clearly inscribed historic forms of Qigong.

Another of the first historic forms is known as Hua To’s Animal Play, a set of practices that express the Qi of the tiger, deer, bear, monkey and crane. Hua To, a well-known and highly revered first century physician of Chinese medicine, was famous for quite a few impressive innovations, including the use of hemp as an anesthetic and for being the “first” surgeon.

It is typical for the more renowned of the historic forms, like the Animal Play of Hua To, to spin off numerous versions over the following thousands of years. I have learned at least a dozen versions of the Animal Play in China and been exposed to a handful more in the United States. It is very nearly impossible to know whether the variation of a historic Qigong form that you may encounter is authentic. However, given the intent of all Qigong, it is likely that interpretations or modifications to historic practices may contain significant improvements on the original. For example, when people ask about how to work with children using Qigong, I suggest modifying

Hua To's Animal Play to be light hearted and easy to learn. How long does it take a group of five-year-olds to make believe and "act like a tiger?"

The Tendon Changing and the Marrow Washing forms that were originally created by Bodhidharma, are prime historic forms that have developed dozens of variations over many years — some gentle for healing, others rigorous and demanding for the martial arts. When Buddhism came to China it was immediately embraced with enthusiasm. Many felt strongly that Buddha may have been a reincarnation of the great Daoist Immortal Lao Zi, or that Lao Zi had been a primary teacher for Buddha.

Buddhism was thought by many to be the later teachings of Lao Zi after his ascension as an immortal. As the legend goes, Lao Zi grew tired of the pettiness of men and the empire, and he elected to disassociate with popular culture in around 450 BC by departing to the west of Xian, into the Zhong Mountains (Zhong Shan). Bodhidharma (Da Mo to the Chinese), who helped import Buddhism to China, did arrive from those same mountains and his sage teachings were as deep as the wisdom of Lao Zi.

When Bodhidharma came to the Shaolin Temple at Song Mountain, he taught the monks a number of Qigong forms including the Tendon Changing and the Marrow Washing Methods. Due the very ancient history of China and its sheer immensity, hundreds or even thousands of versions of these practices exist today. These two methods have become a foundation in my own teaching. I have studied dozens of versions of these forms in my own Qigong evolution. I teach both, in a very simple form that is practical for all new students, whether they are overcoming disease or building physical strength for the martial arts. These forms evolve to a more esoteric form as students advance and deepen their practice.

Because Qigong is derived from our relationship with Qi and this relationship is constantly transforming due to social, scientific, political, spiritual and personal factors, Qigong is always changing. Every era has its newly developed or contemporary forms of Qigong. During the Tang (618-907 CE) and Song (960–1279 CE) dynasties, Qigong flourished and evolved rapidly and many new forms were developed. The period between 1970 and the present was another such renaissance for Qigong. The Qigong explosion following the Cultural Revolution in China was so radical that Qigong historians have called it the Qigong Rush.

Contemporary forms of Qigong can trace their origins back to the ancient legendary era. The Flying Crane Form was first legendary, then historic and now a contemporary interpretation has

evolved to suit contemporary needs. Guo Lin's Cancer Recovery Walking Qigong, developed in the 1970s, originated in the teachings of her grandfather who probably learned from a historic or even legendary lineage. Universal Intelligence Qigong, attributed to Dr. Pang Ming, is an immensely popular contemporary form with over eight million practitioners worldwide. Spontaneous Qigong is probably the most ancient Qigong; it is formless and was probably first done by humans who could not even speak an organized language somewhere around 60,000 years ago.

The Traditions of Qigong

- Fitness, Longevity and Prevention
- Medical
- Daoist
- Buddhist
- Martial

The stories that can be told, particularly of the Daoist, Buddhist and Martial traditions are part of the eloquence and poetry of Qigong. Besides its beautiful connections to nature and the universe, we are amazed by the extraordinary stories of wandering Daoist monks, compassionate Buddhist Masters and the fighters, who used Qi rather than muscle power to defend emperors, court ladies, ministers and even, in certain eras, to topple unethical dynasties.

Qigong for fitness, longevity and disease prevention is the ideal in modern China. If billions of people were unhealthy, it would create a terrible health crisis. The national health system encourages people to sustain their health by using Qigong and Tai Chi. The quest for healthy longevity is traditional in China. In the West, we now live longer, but there is doubt about the quality of life in people who are sustaining their lives with drugs and at risk for side effects and drug interactions. Qigong also enhances performance and productivity by addressing the health and function of those who are relatively well, including athletes, scholars and business people. Ultimately, Qigong helps to create healthy, happy and compassionate people. Traditionally, in China people of wisdom are fondly considered to be immortals.

Medical Qigong is typically practiced by patients who work with physicians who prescribe specific Qigong methods for specific medical conditions, consistent with the diagnosis of Qi deficiency or Qi stagnation. A person with deficiency of kidney Yang leading to cold extremities and fatigue would be prescribed a completely different practice than a person with stagnant liver

Qi. However, general Qigong practices that are used in hospitals and clinics and any form of Qigong that is targeted at resolving medical challenges is considered by many to be medical Qigong. Medical Qigong also includes Qi emission healing or clinical treatment.

Daoist Qigong is the most ancient Chinese framework for perceiving the multidimensional nature of the world. The health or healing gained from one's practice is a side effect of exploring one's relationship with the essence of nature. Daoist Qigong operates on the premise that there is significant value in honoring and caring for body you have been given in this lifetime. Your grandmother's idea that the body is a temple is very consistent with Daoist Qigong.

Buddhist Qigong merges the foundations of Buddhist philosophy and spirituality with Daoism. When Buddhism arrived in China, it was readily embraced as much of its philosophy was consistent with Daoist thought. However, there are some differences. Daoists practice Qigong to honor the spirit by the filling the vessel with vitality, attaining a clear and undisturbed mind to merge with The One. Buddhists tend to discount the body and even the mind as illusory distractions from ultimate reality, which is pure emptiness.

Martial Qigong is the aspect of the martial arts associated with maximizing fighting (or sport) strength to engage in any challenge, physical or mental empowered by the Qi. The great Daoist temples – White Cloud, Dragon-Tiger, Jade Spring as well as the great Buddhist temples – Soul's Retreat, Shaolin, Nine Flowers — were all called upon at many points in China's tumultuous history, to produce monks with the highest spiritual training and values. Because of the monks' cultivation of the invisible forces of Heaven and Earth, they had incredible fighting powers. This created the extraordinary Chinese tradition of Daoist and Buddhist warrior monks who, were also compassionate healers. The martial artist with the greatest skill brings Qi cultivation to the conflict.

The highest value in this context is conflict resolution, achieved with no violence. This innovation of spiritual warriors from China is one of the great contributions of the Chinese Qi community to the world. The same Qi that makes the warrior mighty is the Qi of healing. The greatest victor is the martial expert who solves the conflict without use of martial force. There were times when the conflict was resolved by terrible violence. However this framework of bringing peace of mind and highest spiritual values to bear on disputes will have a positive effect on conflict resolution in contemporary time as the arts of Qi cultivation become more known outside of China.

Body Component in Qigong

One of the easiest ways to describe the kind of Qigong practice is to describe the body component. A method with Buddhist or Daoist origins may appear indistinguishable to all but the most informed eye. Yet the difference between a method performed lying down is very clearly different from a method done sitting or standing, or walking.

Qigong Performed Lying Down	With breath focus and meditation With self-applied massage or postural adjustments With gentle movement
Sitting Qigong	With meditation With massage With gentle movement
Standing Qigong	Meditation in stillness With gentle movement With self-applied massage
Walking Qigong	With gentle or dynamic movement With breath focus and meditation

Gentle movement while lying down means to move the hands, feet, fingers, and toes or to shift the posture while lying down. Just before falling sleep and just after awakening are perfect times to do Qigong while lying down. It can also be easily adapted for those who are recovering from surgery or experiencing severe illness, even those who are unable to get out of bed.

Sitting Qigong is any meditation in the Chinese tradition, or from any other tradition, whether sitting in a chair or cross-legged. Unique to the Chinese tradition are sitting and moving forms. I first learned sitting Qigong with movement from Chang Yi Hsiang of the Tai Hsuan College during my study of Chinese medicine. The Silken Sitting Form starts with two relatively simple forms called Blooming of Spring and Lighting the Back Burning Spaces (associated with the Gate of Life. Then in one of the most beautiful forms I have ever seen, The Ascending Dragon, the practitioner goes from sitting to standing.

Standing Qigong is probably the most common form of Qigong. Universal Intelligence Qigong, also known as ChiLel Qigong in the United States is a kind of standing Qigong. Other examples of standing Qigong are Tendon Changing, Marrow Washing, Seven Precious Gestures, the Vitality Method, and Dao Guang (Daoist Light) Qigong, to name a few. While most forms can be adapted for sitting those who are well usually do them standing. Standing builds strength and endurance.

Walking Qigong is any form where the practitioner advances or steps back. Tai Chi is the most widely known walking form of Qigong. While Tai Chi is quite complex, the contemporary Guo Lin Cancer Recovery Walking Qigong is one of the easiest forms of Qigong to grasp and use. This is excellent because people with cancer need powerful tools that are easy to use. Research has proven that the method developed by Guo Lin is also very effective for many other disorders including diabetes. One of my favorite forms of walking Qigong is the Wild Goose (Dayan Gong). In it you “become” a wild goose, the bird revered by the Chinese to fly the highest and which has the most direct experience of touching Heaven and collecting the Qi of Heaven.

Self administered massage, to both the muscle groups and pressure points along with patting and even gentle pounding, is frequently included in Qigong. Anything that enhances, refines and cultivates the Qi is Qigong.

The Dynamic Form and Focus of Qigong

Two subtle features to mapping the universe of Qigong are its dynamic form and focus. The dynamic form of Qigong reveals the vast difference between Yin, absolute stillness, and Yang, extreme movement. Specific and directed Qigong forms cultivate Qi in a completely different context than purely spontaneous and formless methods. An almost separate universe of Qigong emerges in the context of the external focus of Qigong.

The Dynamic of Qigong

- Quiescent
- Dynamic
- Vigorous

The focus of Qigong is deep relaxation and a deliberate freeing of the nervous system and inner function from the effects of tension. When one elects to enter the Qigong state, during a Qigong practice session or anytime throughout the day, posture and breath are important. However it is the state of clear minded relaxation that has the most power to pull you into the Qigong state. Most Qigong forms are relatively Quiescent, allowing for the decrease of inner resistance and maximum flow.

One can also attain the Qigong state in dynamic or vigorous practices. In fact Gongfu (kung fu), the renowned martial arts now called Wu Shu in China, has the intention of sustained Qi focus during intense activity and conflict. There are cleansing or purifying methods that are more vigorous with the intention of expelling spent or extra Qi. While all forms of Qigong are meditations, the quiescent forms are the closest to what we usually associate with meditation. In reclining, sitting, and standing Qigong there can be absolute stillness or there can be movement. In quiescent Qigong – lying down, sitting or standing – there is only stillness.

According to an ancient proverb, “The more you focus on movement outside, the less you can focus on movement inside.” When you place your attention on external movement, Qi and inner resources are busy attending to the function of the muscles and the metabolism of “doing.” When the mind is externally focused the preferred state of inner directed, clear and neutral mind is less attainable.

It is also stated, “Those who practice only quiescence become ill with diseases of stagnation.” Given the value of inner focus and calm in Qigong, it seems like a major contradiction that the quiescent state causes stagnation of inner fluids (blood and lymph) and a stagnation of Qi, which can lead to disease. Rather than a contradiction, this is a revelation of Yin – Yang harmony and balance. It is best to have a Qigong practice that combines the quiescent methods with the dynamic methods.

Martial arts usually include meditation practices. The meditation is Yin; the vigorous martial arts methods are Yang. The two together foster balance and harmony of the body, mind and spirit. Many forms of Qigong are mildly dynamic, that is neither completely quiescent nor wildly vigorous. Such forms inherently harmonize Yin and Yang within one method. All forms of Tai Chi are mildly dynamic and carefully balanced — allowing mind clearing, meditation and relaxation to occur simultaneously with gentle movement. The most important aspect of Qigong is that it allows the healing and empowering effects of both meditation and gentle movement to act synergistically.

The Form

- Form – specific, directed, formalized
- No form – spontaneous, formless, nonspecific, intuitive

Qigong forms frequently have beautiful poetic and philosophical names that deepen their meaning. What other health promotion practice uses images like “Hands Pass Like Clouds” or “Immortal Dragon Cultivating Golden Elixir”? The inner practices can also have very poetic descriptions as in “Merging Water and Fire to Transcend the Matrix” or “Circulating the Light of the Inner Heaven.”

Some Qigong forms are brief, simple, and easy to learn, practice, and teach. For example, in Flowing Motion, a classic used by millions of people in China, you simply start in a preliminary standing posture. On the inhalation, with arms at your side, you swing the arms forward and upward slowly on the inhalation, until at about the level of your eyes. On the exhalation, you allow the arms to drift back down, gently. You may repeat a few or many times. Simply doing one hundred repetitions of the Flowing Motion is noted in China as a way to “be healthy for the rest of your life.” It is said that if you do a thousand repetitions daily of the Flowing Motion, you will become immortal. Most people understand that, to the Chinese, this means you will gain access to your universal and eternal self.

Some Qigong forms such as Tai Chi (Taiji) are detailed and lengthy. Tai Chi (Taiji) is an elaborate Qigong style with 108 movements done in the same order and in the same way every time. In Tai Chi, you become deeply involved in purposefully coordinating yourself with universal energies and principles — the Supreme Ultimate. Another detailed specific form is the Wild Goose Form (Dayan Gong), which has two sections of 64 movements. Most forms can be broken down into smaller components for ease of learning and practice. The Tai Chi Long Form of 108 movements is often shortened 24, 28 or 32 movements. The traditional 108 movements can be reduced even further to a subset of 10 to 13 movements that are repeated, called Tai Chi Qigong.

In Spontaneous or Formless Qigong, there is nothing to learn and nothing to follow. Natural Flow Qigong is formless Qigong. Quiescent Qigong meditation where there is no external movement is formless as there is no external movements to learn and practice. Methods that include body movement, but are not directed, specific and formalized are also formless. The very

simple nature of formless Qigong makes it particularly accessible to people who feel uncoordinated or do not believe they have the time to grasp Qigong forms. The difference between a beginner and someone with more experience in formless Qigong is invisible. When I lead classes or practices in formless Qigong people always comment that it was their favorite part. With the formless method you can work the Qi into the deepest places where it is needed, the way water finds its way deep into the aquifer underground.

Spontaneous Qigong is sometimes called Wuji Qigong or Dancing in Primordial Chaos because each practitioner tunes in to their own prebirth nature — their prenatal, primordial or original state — beyond personal conditioning and local personality. While you may be ill or challenged, you are already healed and supremely well in your universal self – the Spirit (Shen). Dancing in Chaos is also called Shen Qigong, a method for accessing the ultimate and essential perfection of the universal self (Shen). In this formless method the practitioner channels or absorbs their Shen, their universal nature, purposefully into the Body-Mind of the local self. This primordial potential collects in the Qi channels and Elixir Fields (Dan Tian) to enhance the present condition. The primordial self — the already perfect version of the self — is latent within.

Wuji Qigong at this point becomes less focused on collecting something from outside and more on revealing what is already buried within — perfect health, intuition and insight, productivity, creativity and inner peace. The highest Qigong attainment is impossible to teach, because the most advanced methods are formless. The most advanced Qigong comes from direct experience of the true nature of Qi, one's eternal nature and the Universe itself.

External and Internal Focus

- Internal Qigong - Neigong
- External Qigong - Waigong

Ancient philosophical traditions are often paradoxical, and so too can be the concepts of internal and external focus in Qigong and Tai Chi. Internal refers to that which is always within you. However, external can mean two completely different things. Understanding this will make many discussions and texts clearer, particularly those that refer to external Qigong.

Internal Qigong (Neigong) simply means that the focus of the practice lies within you. All forms of Qigong, from Tai Chi to the thousands of health improvement Qigong techniques practiced in

the parks and hospitals in China, are types of internal practice. Deeper or more advanced internal practices or Inner Alchemy (Nei Dan) are focused on spiritual transformation.

External Qigong (Waigong), particularly when used to describe the focus of one's personal practice usually means that the methods include movement of the muscles and extremities. If the internal self is represented by the organs, fluids and the merging of Heaven and Earth in the HeartMind, the extremities and muscles are relatively external. Martial arts practices, which often have a Qi cultivation component, express the power of the Qi in the muscles and extremities. But the paradox of Qigong is that an external form of Qi cultivation, the martial arts for example, can have an internal component as well, in this case Kung Fu. The most paradoxical is — Tai Chi is considered an internal form of martial art, but an external form of Qigong.

Qigong consisting of external body movement, bodily health and building strength and flexibility of the limbs is considered external. Internal Qigong typically focuses on more quiescent body methods (less external movement) along with mind and spirit — not only for healing and longevity, but to enhance wisdom and insight as well. Both internal and external become relative when the martial aspect of the Chinese disciplines are discussed. You could say that internally focused martial arts are usually somewhere near equivalent to externally focused Qigong.

Qi Transmission Healing

There is one additional aspect of external Qigong, however, that is one of the most fascinating aspects of Qi cultivation. External Qi Healing (Wai Qigong) describes a practice of Qigong where a practitioner transmits or channels Qi to help or treat another. Qi is invisible and difficult to explain or categorize scientifically. As a result, external Qigong based in transmitting healing influence to others is somewhat controversial.

We are gaining a better understanding of what the Chinese ancients discovered in research on what is now called non-local or distant healing. There is wide variety of such distant healing methodologies based on Qi, Prana, magnetic energy and consciousness including Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Reiki, Prana Healing, Polarity Therapy, SHEN Therapy as well as Qigong Healing and prayer. Many people have derived powerful health enhancement and dramatic healing from such modalities.

One of the important differences between Qigong healing and many of the other forms of distant healing is that Qigong inherently includes an entire system of personal practice — internal

Qigong — to complement the healing from a practitioner. Whether Qigong healing is provided by a friend, a Qigong Healer or a physician, it should always include self-practice of internal Qigong methods. If you find yourself with a teacher who does not enthusiastically combine personal internal practice with Qi transmission healing, or if you find yourself with a “healer” who does not enthusiastically suggest personal internal practice to complement external Qi healing, I caution you sincerely to seek alternative teaching or treatment.

Conclusion

With the thousands of Qigong forms to choose from you can easily find a tradition, dynamic or focus that suits your goals, medical condition, and philosophy. Like the ancient Qi masters you may find yourself combining your favorite methods and practices to create your own personal form. The best form is not so much one that is famous, the favorite of a renowned master or from a particular tradition. The best form is the one you use consistently and share with others. This will keep the practice of Qigong alive and evolving for lifetimes to come while eliminating inner resistance to allow Qi to fulfill its promises.