



Qigong roots – a history

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In his second article on qigong Gordon Faulkner covers its history and development from the Qin dynasty in BCE 221 to the modern day People's Republic of China, its inclusion in modern day medicine and the PRC's restriction on teaching by masters

Qin (221-206 BCE)

The first dynasty was very short and little happened, in terms of innovation, in the qigong world that has yet to be discovered.

Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 20 CE)

The Han dynasty is normally divided into two parts: the Western/Former Han (206 BCE-9 CE) and the Eastern/Later Han (25-220). For simplicity I have treated them as one long dynasty.

In 1983, at the Zhangjiashan burial site in Jiangling county, Hubei province, in tomb number 247, archaeologists excavated the resting place of a Han official who was interred in 186 BCE. Among the many texts recovered in this tomb was a bamboo-strip document, the *Yinshu* (Pulling Book), which is the earliest existing text specifically on qigong. This document, with a step-by-step guide to movement, illustrates how using qigong through daily and seasonal exercises was a key regimen to build strong healthy bodies and self-treat illness.

In 1963 at Mawangdui, near Changsha, Hunan province, three tombs were discovered, but it was not until between 1972-1974 that archaeologists explored these tombs.

Tomb number three, dated to 168 BCE, was a treasure trove of military, medical, and astronomical manuscripts. These texts, written on silk, were of major historical significance. The medical category contained the now famous *Daoyin tu* (Daoyin Diagram, also known as the Guoyin tu).

Another text found here was Quegu Shiqi Pian, a book that is mainly concerned with breathing methods.

The famous doctor, Hua Tuo (141-208), was the creator of the wuqinxu (Five-Animal Play), a qigong set based on the movements of tigers, deer, bears, apes and birds that, over almost the next 2,000 years, spawned hundreds of variations. Fortunately, most of the poor versions died out and we are left with probably a few dozen effective variations today. These variations may also contain a completely different set of five animals!

Another famous doctor from this period who recognised the value of qigong was Zhang Zhongjing (150-219), who wrote in his *Jingui yaolue* (Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet), "...When our limbs feel heavy and uncomfortable, we should do some qigong exercises to get out the stale and take in the fresh ..."

Six Dynasties period (220-589)

Also commonly known as the period of disunity as it covers the Three Kingdoms (220-265), the Jin Dynasty (265-420) and the time of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-589).

As mentioned in Part 1, the Daoist priest Xu Xun (239-374) is believed to have been the first to use the term qigong in its modern sense in his book *Ling jian zi* (Miraculous Swordsmanship). He was a regular practitioner of qigong exercises and is said to have lived to the age of 136. However, it is also said the book was not written by Xu Xun himself because many qigong terms in the book were only used after the Song Dynasty, so the book could not have been written earlier than that dynasty. This text now only exists in the compendium *Jingming zongjiao lu* (Record of the Lineage and Teachings of [the School of] Purity and Brightness), which was printed around 1691 in the Qing Dynasty. Because of this, some researchers place the first use of the name in the Qing. Whatever the truth, the document states that qigong is used to regulate the body, adjust the breath and align the unity of mind and body—three keys to practice.

Xi Kang (223-262) wrote the *Yangsheng lun* (On Nourishing Life) and although this document is now lost, it is cited over a hundred times in other texts. The *Yangsheng lun* was also known to Zhang Zhan (early 4th century), who wrote *Yangsheng yaoji* (Essentials on Nourishing Life), which is thought to have been one of the main qigong text books during the Six Dynasties. Unfortunately, this text was also lost and survives only in fragments and citations.

The philosopher, Ge Hong (283-343), author of *Zhouhou beijifang* (Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies) and the *Baopuzi* (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity), was very influential in neidan (internal alchemy) and medicine. Qigong became very important to both disciplines. He said "qigong exercises were meant to cure diseases beforehand [prophylactic] and achieve harmony among all elements".

In the 4th century, the first text dealing systematically with qigong is the *Taiqing daoyin yangsheng jing* (Great Purity Treatise on Healing Exercises and Nourishing Life) attributed to Master Jingli or Jinghei. This manuscript is generally referred to by the shorted name of *Daoyin jing*, and is the only text in the Daoist Canon that deals exclusively with qigong.

Although the work consists of qigong techniques of Daolin (Zhi Dun, 314-366) and those ascribed to the



A statue of Zhang Sanfeng in Wudangshan

legendary practitioners, Chisongzi, Ningfengzi, Pengzu, Wang Ziqiao. Many scholars believe the text is not earlier than the 6th century.

The age of the text is largely irrelevant to modern practitioners, as it is one of the primary sources of qigong study because it contains a wide range of information about several schools within the tradition.

The Yangxing yanminglu (Record on Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life), attributed to Tao Hongjing (452-536), was based on the *Yangsheng yaoji* mentioned above. This text is notable for the association of qigong with anmo (massage). Indeed, the fifth section of this volume is devoted to qigong and anmo. This book also contains the earliest surviving text of the liuzijue (Six Character Formula, also called Six Healing/Secret Sounds) of the popular qigong exercise set.

Sui Dynasty (581-618)

China was re-unified under the short-lived Sui Dynasty. This dynasty only had two emperors, but they were both enthusiastic supporters of qigong. In fact, Emperor Yangdi employed a large number of qigong practitioners – who were also massage teachers – at the imperial court, with the objective of establishing qigong as a major component of state medicine.

This led to a major innovation in therapeutic qigong in 610 when Chao Yuanfang (550-630), a doctor of the Imperial Medical Academy, compiled the *Zhubing yuanhou lun* (Treatise on the Origin and Symptoms of Diseases). This encyclopaedia, apart from containing 1,739 medical discussions, prescribes 213 different qigong exercises for 110 different symptoms. It is this compendium that includes many of the qigong exercises from the previously mentioned lost texts.

Tang Dynasty (618-907)

In 652, Sun Simiao (581-682), a renowned physician often called the king of medicine, compiled the *Qianjin*



Copies of this chart of 44 qigong exercises now hang on the walls of qigong training centres all over the world. Its importance to qigong history is immense and many modern qigong routines are named after this chart

yaofang (Prescriptions Worth a Thousand in Gold) in which he introduced many therapeutic exercises based on qigong, notably a version of the liuzijue.

Sima Chengzhen (647-735), the 6th patriarch of the Shangqing school of Daoism and neidan proponent, wrote the *Xiuzhen jingyi zhalun* (Miscellaneous Discourses on the Essential Meaning of Cultivating Perfection) which gave exercises to be practised daily and required them to be performed in the correct sequence if they were to be effective in curing disease and maintaining health. This was a new development in qigong.

During the Tang dynasty, qigong continued to be an official part of the Imperial Court Medicine and was generally in the hands of the *anmo* (massage) specialist.

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960)

This was a chaotic time of political upheaval and division and while there were no new notable developments in qigong, its practice continued and the knowledge was maintained.

Song Dynasty (960-1279)

Qigong and its parent yangsheng practices underwent significant changes from the Song period onward, which integrated the elements drawn from neidan methods. The introduction of woodblock printing in this period also meant that many of the classical medical texts were rewritten or revised and disseminated.

Zhang Junfang (961?-1042?) compiled the *Yunji qiqian* (Seven Slips from a Cloudy Satchel, c. 1029), a collection of Daoist scriptures that contains several qigong routines including wuqinxi, xuanjian daoyin, Pengzu's qigong and many others.

Qigong found a place in many medical documents written in this period and thereafter. The *Shengji zonglu* (Sagely Benefaction Medical Encyclopaedia, 1117), compiled by staff of the Imperial Medical College, contains two chapters on qigong.

One of today's most popular form of qigong which began in this period was the creation of the *baduanjin* (Eight Pieces of Brocade). This is ascribed to General Yue Fei (1103-1142) who, according to legend, learned Buddhist Emei mountain style qigong and Daoist Wudang mountain style qigong. Now, there are many versions of *baduanjin*: hard, soft, seated and standing.

The Daoshu (Pivot of the Dao, 1136) is a 42 volume compendium of texts compiled by Zeng Zao (fl. 1131-1155) dealing with neidan and yangsheng, keeping the qigong movement very active and expanding.

Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)

This dynasty (overlapped the Song) was known for its religious tolerance, but this period also saw many disputes between Buddhists and Daoists aiming for emperor's patronage.

The notable legendary figure from this period is Zhang Sanfeng, who is credited with creating tai chi chuan.

Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Li Shizhen (1518-1593), the eminent physician famous for compiling the monumental *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of Materia Medica) also emphasised the importance of co-ordinating qigong practice.

Illustrations in books became a major feature in Ming publishing and the text entitled *Chifeng sui* (Marrow of the Red Phoenix, 1578), is an illustrated manual on qigong, by the scholar, Zhou Lujing (1549-1640 or 1542-1633). The text contains many qigong routines including wuqinxi, *baduanjin* and liuzijue.

Zhou Lujing also compiled the illustrated encyclopaedia *Yimen guangdu* (Extensive texts from the Peaceful Gate, 1597) which likewise contains several qigong routines.

In this period Wang Qi and his son Wang Siyi also compiled an encyclopaedia the *Sancai tuhui* (Illustrations of Heaven, Earth and Man, 1609) which contains drawings of qigong exercises originally devised by Chen Xiyi, (Chen Tuan 871-989), to be carried out at different hours in different periods of the year.

Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

Although Shen Jinao (1717-1776), an outstanding doctor, devoted exclusive chapters of his book *Sheshizun shengshu* (Shen's Experience on the Conservation of Health, 1773), to the treatment of disease through qigong exercise, the Qing Dynasty produced no important works on the subject and the popularity of qigong declined.

Republic period (1912-1949)

Few books with qigong were published in this period and except for *Yinshizi jingzuofa* (Master Yinshi's Quiet Sitting Methods, 1914) by Jiang Weiqiao (1873-1958) and *Weisheng shenglixue mingzhi* (Clear Explanations of Hygiene and Physiology, c.1930) by Daoist master Zhao Bichen (1860-1942) most were of little value.

People's Republic of China (1949-present)

As a whole, qigong was neglected and on the verge of extinction. Fortunately, it was brought back to life in the 1950s when Liu Guizhen opened the Qigong Rehabilitation Hospital at Beidaihe, in Hebei province, the first clinic to standardise the use of medical qigong. Liu Guizhen is also responsible for the name that came to be used most frequently around the modern world: qigong. After the success of Beidaihe, over 200 hospitals added qigong to their therapies and the Chinese government organised comprehensive research into the subject. Qigong became popular again, various styles began to be taught openly, and many old books were re-published.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) created chaos throughout China on many levels, including banning of all qigong.

After the end of the chaos, in the late 1970s, qigong regained importance in improving and maintaining health, which led to a boom in the practices in the 1980s and 1990s with over 2,000 organisations and anything up to an estimated 200 million practitioners.

However, several of these organisations, like Zhangmi Gong, Zhong Gong and Falun Gong were thought to be turning into cults that threatened the Chinese government – China has a long history of disastrous millennial cults – which, in 1999 started a crackdown on qigong organisations that were perceived to challenge state

control, including prohibiting mass qigong practice, shutdown of some qigong clinics and hospitals, and banning groups headed by grandmaster gurus claiming supernatural powers.

For a short period, the name qigong was not used, but in 2000, in an attempt to regulate qigong practice and exclude masters, the Chinese Health Qigong association was established with the aim of promoting qigong exercise without cults developing around masters. The Association regulated public qigong practice, restricting the number of people that could gather at a time, requiring state approved training and certification of instructors. Initially, only four standardised forms were included, but today that has expanded to nine.

Finally a quick mention of the early days in the West



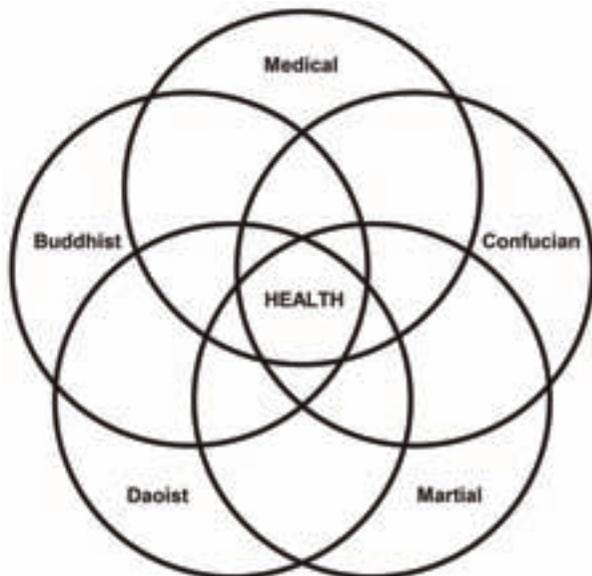
The first mention of qigong in the West was in French by Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727-1780), a French Jesuit missionary who introduced qigong, which he called Cong-fou (Kung Fu) to the West in a text written in 1779.

The first mention of qigong in English was in 1895, by a Scottish missionary doctor in China, John Dudgeon (1837-1901), who wrote the book *Kung-Fu, or Taoist Medical Gymnastics*.

A full history of qigong would require several volumes. Therefore, compressing several thousands of years into this short history means that there are many omissions. However, one thing that stands out from this summary is that despite the various traditions of qigong, Medical, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist and Martial, the central tenet has always been an individual's health and most qigong texts are preserved in medical literature. This shows that to understand how the mechanism of qigong works, a basic knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine is fundamental.

Qigong is now popular throughout the entire world. The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain has recognised the importance of qigong in this modern world and is now called Tai Chi & Qigong Union for Great Britain to encompass those practices. 🇬🇧

Gordon Faulkner has had a keen interest in Chinese culture for over 60 years. He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and a member of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding. He started his martial training in 1968 and eventually switched to the style he does today, Chanquanshu, in 1972 while serving with the RAF. In 1999 he became a closed door disciple of daoyin master Zhang Guangde and in 2003, Master You Xuande at Wudang Shan accepted him as a 15th generation disciple of Wudang boxing.



Qigong Traditions