

***“The Dao begot one.
One begot two.
Two begot three.
And three begot the ten thousand things.***

***The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.”***

- Laozi, Daodejing

What the above verse is telling us is that the Tao or Dao is responsible for all that is. It's the originator and creator of absolutely everything that exists. The Dao in its state of emptiness and nothingness and yet accomplishing everything (*Wu Wei*), spontaneously self-unfolded into two basic forces, Yin and Yang (*One begot two*). From these two forces or energies, Heaven and Earth were created and the joining of the Heaven and the Earth created humanity (*Two begot three*). Then everything else that exists was created (*the ten thousand things*) carrying Yin and embracing Yang. Yin and Yang describe the fundamental dynamic balance of the whole universe at every level of magnification, from the cosmos right down to every cell in the micro-cosmos of the human body and every living thing (Guo and Powell 2001, p11). Yin and Yang are opposing each other but they hold a complimentary relationship and they are always found together. They are endlessly transforming one into the other. One cannot exist without the other. One it is found within the other and when there is an imbalance between the two, one can overcome the other.

The rhythm of nature is driven by the dynamic interaction of Yin and Yang. That was the view of Chinese philosophers including Daoists and from there they formed a pattern of grouping and classification. They realised that everything in the world could be grouped into complementary categories (Moeller 2004, p106). Heaven and Earth, sun and the moon, day and night, summer and winter, male and female, all were classified as corresponding to Yang and Yin. More than two thousand years ago, the theories of Yin and Yang were expanded into a system of the “five phases” or “five elements” (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water). Such system along with the concept of **Qi** and the system of the meridians (network of energy channels running throughout the entire human body) are the fundamental pillars within Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM focuses on facilitating harmony between Yin and Yang and how to create and circulate an abundance of **Qi** to promote health and well being.

The relevance of Taoist philosophy and Traditional Chinese Medicine practices to the Qigong one practises today is evident and permeates every aspect of the discipline. One can refer to different sources for the definition of Qigong to find this relevance. For example, Guo and Powell (2001, p15) define Qigong as the ability to work with **Qi** and “comes from an esoteric tradition that lies at the heart of Daoist and Buddhist teachings”. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the concept of **Qi** is one of the most important ancient Chinese physical notions and it is essential for Daoist theories of the body and bodily practises (Moeller 2004, p75). The word **Qi** has been translated to English as “vital force” or “energy”. According to the Daoist theories, **Qi** is in everything that exists, including humans and the cultivation of the human's body meant –not only in Daoism but in general- the cultivation of the human's **Qi**. Many techniques were developed for this cultivation and a generic term for these techniques is **Qigong**.

According to Khon (1993, p133), “Physical exercises are the first active step taken toward the Tao”. **Qi** is the vital power of the Tao in the world and the goal of doing physical exercises is to cultivate and harmonise **Qi**. If **Qi** is strong and it’s flowing freely throughout the body, one promotes health and well being and one lives in harmony with nature and the universe. **Qi** manifests in the body in different forms. One is the breath. Breathing is essential for good health and long life. Contrary to some people beliefs, breathing is even more important than food and drink. One can survive a few days without water and even a week without food. However, if the mouth is covered and the nostrils in the nose are blocked to stop the breathing, one will die in a couple of minutes. This alone shows the importance of breathing but most importantly, through breathing, every cell in the human body gets a continuous supply of oxygen in order to live and function properly. Daoist theories recognised the importance of proper breathing and references about breathing exercises are found in the *Zhuangzi* and in documents excavated from tombs of the former Han dynasty (Khon 1993, p135). Likewise, references about Exercises of the **Qi** are found in three different chapters of the *Daodejing* (Moeller 2004, p76).

The breathing pattern is a very important element of the Qigong exercises. Having deep and long breaths is essential for relaxation. Before commencing with the 18 shibashi exercises it is recommended to practise abdominal breathing a few times and then carry on with the Qigong exercises following this breathing pattern. It is very important to allow the breathing to lead the movements and not the movements to lead the breathing. With regular practise the breathing pattern (in and out) becomes longer and the movements become slower falling into a state of relaxation. The breathing and the movement engage in a rhythmical pattern, breathing in when lifting or opening and breathing out when sinking or closing.

In addition to the breathing, when practising Qigong one can see that the exercises incorporate the Daoists theories and the Traditional Chinese Medicine principles discussed so far and they do it in a very harmonious way. The Daoyin exercises are aimed to warm up the body and to invigorate the flow of **Qi** throughout the entire body. When one is standing with the arms stretching upwards, one is standing between Earth and Heaven. According to the Daoist tradition, this is the place of humans in the cosmos (Guo and Powell 2001, p17). As one stands, **Qi** is flowing in the micro-cosmos of the human body according to the universal law. The Qigong exercise movements were thought to work with the six rising Yin meridians and the six descending Yang meridians in the human body in order to promote the flow of **Qi** and combine the energy of the Earth with the **Qi** of the Heaven.

The concept of energy centres of the body can be traced to the ancient teachings of the Daoist school of Quanzhendao (Ultimate truth of the Dao) (Guo and Powell 2001, p127). It was discovered that with regular Qigong practise, the energy flowed within the body in horizontal and vertical planes intersecting in three places in the human body: The head, the chest and the lower abdomen. On these intersections intense energy could be generated. These energy centres were called the Lower Dantian, the Middle Dantian and the Upper Dantian. To show the relevance of the energy centres in Qigong, let us make reference to some of the Qigong shibashi exercises. “Tai chi start” for example is very grounding, helping to align the body and bringing **Qi** to the Lower Dantian. “Separating the Clouds” work with the three dantian as one move the hands along the centre of the body, aligning the Lao gong point on the palms of the hands with the Lower, Middle and Upper Dantian. “Settling and balancing Qi” helps to bring Qi down the centre line back to the Lower Dantian where it can be stored (Tai Chi Nation 2013 p43).

Discuss the relevance of Taoist philosophy and historical practises to the Qigong you practice today – By Fernando G. Echeveste

The Qigong exercises also work in different ways with the energy points from the meridian system in the human body to promote the free flow of **Qi** and to release any **Qi** stagnation caused by stress or by physical or emotional issues. In “Tai chi start” one can focus the mind on the Lao Gong point (Pericardium 8) on the centre of the palms of the hands. In “Opening the chest” the Yong Quan point (Kidney 1) on the sole of the foot is massaged when tilting forward to open the chest. In “Rainbow dance” the Lao Gong point is aligned with the Baihui point (GV20) on top of the head. In “Repulse Monkey” the Hegu point (LI 4) in the back of the hand is aligned with the Tong Zi Liao point (GB 1) on the edge of the eye. After mentioning only a subset of the exercises, one can notice how these alignments of energy points from different meridians follow the supporting and controlling relationship of the elements within the five element theory.

It has been described the influence and the relevance Taoism and Traditional Chinese Medicine practices has on the Qigong one practices today. One does not have to be Daoist to practise Qigong. Furthermore, the Qigong practice does not make one a Daoist (Echeveste 2013, ch43). However, by practising Qigong on a regular basis, one can reap the benefits it brings to the mind, body and spirit.

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