

Tai Chi, Qi Gong and Reiki

Dennis A. Chu, MD^{a,b,*}

^a*Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation,
University of California Davis Medical Center, 4860 Y Street, Suite 1700,
Sacramento, CA 95817, USA*

^b*Roseville Pain and Rehabilitation Medical Clinic, 2330 Professional Drive,
Suite 100, Roseville, CA 95661, USA*

Before discussing Qi Gong and Tai Chi, one needs to understand clearly the concept of Qi in Chinese culture. *Qi* in Chinese means “air,” “puff,” or “power.” Qi is the universal life force that exists in all living things. No comparable word in English exists to describe Qi. In Japanese, it is called *Ki*, as in Reiki. In Sanskrit, it is called *Prana*.

Qi can be compared with the electrical charge in a battery. A new battery has a full electrical charge, which can be used to operate a radio, boom box, or electric toy. When the battery is old, exhausted of all electrical charge, it no longer can be used for any battery-powered item. When a person is full of Qi, he or she can work or be active without fatigue. When the body is low in Qi, it becomes tired easily. A person with chronic fatigue syndrome can be said to be chronically low in Qi. When a person’s body is exhausted of Qi, the person is dead.

At the time of birth, an infant inherits Qi from his or her parents. This Qi is called preheaven Qi, or original Qi (*Yuan Qi*). When the infant grows up, it requires foods to produce energy. The Qi that comes from foods is called food Qi (*Gu Qi*). The Gu Qi ascends up to the lung and is associated with air to become gathering Qi (*Zhong Qi*). The Zhong Qi is transformed to true Qi (*Zhen Qi*), which spreads out over the body to nourish each organ and channel. True Qi or Zhen Qi assumes two different forms: nutritive Qi (*Ying Qi*) and defense Qi (*Wei Qi*) [1]. Qi Gong and Tai Chi are special exercises designed to increase Qi in the body.

* Roseville Pain and Rehabilitation Medical Clinic, 2330 Professional Drive, Suite 100, Roseville, CA 95661, USA.

E-mail address: dachu@cwnet.com

Qi Gong

There is no exact known recorded time when Qi Gong started. A verbal tradition of practices resembling Qi Gong may go back 10,000 years [2]. The ancient inventors of Qi Gong imitated animals and nature to invent different sets of exercises to enhance Qi and to prolong life. It is estimated that there are 7000 to 8000 different sets of Qi Gong exercises. Some Qi Gong exercises are specific for certain illnesses or diseases, such as breast cancer and Parkinson's disease. Qi Gong and Tai Chi exercises are different from traditional physical exercises in the following aspects:

1. *Slow*: One should perform Qi Gong or Tai Chi exercises slowly. The slower one performs Qi Gong or Tai Chi, the more effective the exercises are.
2. *Focus*: Full concentration is required in Qi Gong or Tai Chi exercises. At times, one may perform the exercises with closed eyes to avoid distraction. One should never do Qi Gong or Tai Chi exercises while watching television or listening to music. The distraction may reduce the effectiveness of Qi Gong and Tai Chi exercises.
3. *Breathing*: Practitioners of Qi Gong and Tai Chi learn to incorporate the physical movements and the breathing. One develops the imagery to direct the Qi flow during the breathing from the nose and mouth to the Dan Tien, a location 3 inches below the umbilicus and 2.5 inches deep from the surface. Initially, visualization of Qi flow is necessary. When the practitioner is advanced, he or she may feel the Qi in the body and can use the mind to direct Qi to different areas of the body to heal the injury or to direct the Qi from the body out through the midpalm at a point called *Lao Kung* or *pericardium-8*. It was said that Master Qi Gong, or the most elevated of Qi Gong practitioners, can heal another person without even touching him or her.
4. *Relaxing*: Relaxing is one of the most important factors in practicing Qi Gong and Tai Chi. It was said in Tai Chi Classic when practicing Qi Gong, one needs to be loose and relaxed and not permit even the slightest tension, which reduces the speed of Qi flow [3]. The tension results in muscle contraction, impairs the blood flow, and decreases the Qi flow.

Tai Chi

The word *Tai* means “big, extreme,” and *Chi* means “utmost, excellence.” *Tai Chi* means “the ultimate,” the immense existence, the eternal. Tai Chi is the way of life that has been practiced by the Chinese for thousands of years. Tai Chi comprises two equal powers: *Yin*, negative power (yielding), and *Yang*, positive power (action). These two powers oppose and yet complement each other. All manifestations in the world are the results of Yin and Yang

interaction. There will always be Yin in Yang and Yang in Yin. There is never absolute Yin or absolute Yang. All traditional Chinese arts, such as brush painting, calligraphy, literature, and poetry, emphasized Yin/Yang principles as the mean of reaching the ultimate [4].

History of Tai Chi and its development

Approximately 1700 years ago, a Chinese physician, Huo To, emphasized physical and mental exercises as a means of improving health. He believed that humans should exercise and imitate the movements of animals, such as birds, tigers, snakes, and bears, to recover original life abilities that have been lost. He organized these exercises into folklore fighting art, called *Five Animal Games*. This was the first systematized martial art in China.

Around 475 C.E., Ta Mo (Bodhidharma) came to China from India to spread his religious teachings. He resided in the Shaolin temple in the Tang Tung, Northern China. Besides religious worship and meditation, he taught physical training in the daily routine. He expanded Five Animal Games into a well-known martial art known as *Shaolin* martial art. This was the dawn of the systematic development of the external martial arts in China.

Various martial arts in China are divided into external and internal martial arts. The external martial arts (Kung Fu, Tae Kwon do, karate, and others) emphasize training techniques and building up the body. These martial arts rely on a person's physical brute strength (Li) to defend oneself and to overcome the opponents. Internal martial arts emphasize the development and building up of Qi in the body first and later on apply Qi built up to the physical techniques in self-defense. In reality, most martial arts employ external and internal styles. They differ only in their emphasis and preference [5].

In 1200 C.E., a Taoist monk, Chang San-Feng, founded a temple in Wu Tang Mountain for the practice of Taoism. He emphasized the importance Yin/Yang harmony as a means of developing mental and physical ability. He encouraged natural meditation and body movement propelled by an internal power, called *Qi*. An original set of 13 movements for exercises were compiled, imitating the natural movements of animals. This martial art system was called *Tai Chi*, or internal martial art, emphasizing the development of internal force as Qi, as opposed to external martial art, placing importance on the development of external force (Li).

Tai Chi was passed on from generation to generation. Many family surnames were associated with different styles of Tai Chi, such as the Wu style, Yang style, and Chen style. Around mid-1600, the Manchurians invaded China and established the Ch'ing dynasty. Soon they adapted to the Chinese lifestyle. The empire builders drafted the most famous Tai Chi master of the times, Yang Lu Chang (1799–1872) to teach in the royal court. Mater Yang Lu Chang, the founder of the Yang Tai Chi system, unwilling

to teach the Manchus, deliberately modified the Tai Chi system into a kind of outer physical exercise—devoid of inner philosophy and mental exercises. This exercise style of Tai Chi was encouraged and practiced by members of the Imperial Court. It became a fad of the leisurely class in China until the end of the Ch'ing dynasty.

When the Ch'ing dynasty was overthrown in 1910, many noble families were scattered throughout China. Tai Chi traveled with them. In this way, the modified form of Tai Chi became today's Tai Chi Chuan, or Tai Chi exercises or Tai Chi dance as called by many Westerners.

In addition to Tai Chi, later on other internal martial arts were developed, such as *Hsing-I*, the form and mind system originated by Yu Fei in Sung Dynasty, and *Pakua*, the eight diagram martial art system. Hsing-I and Pakua consist of fewer martial art movements, focusing on development of internal force (Qi) [6].

How to cultivate Qi

The cultivation of Qi for health has been well documented in many ancient Chinese medical books, consisting of eating nutritious food, exercising regularly, and achieving mental peace. Qi also is cultivated for power in martial arts. The idea of Qi as a source of well-being and power has been the foundation of many martial arts, especially Tai Chi. There are two important steps in cultivating Qi: classic meditation and Tai Chi Meditative exercises.

Classic meditation

Classic meditation usually is practiced in a sitting position. It is possible, however, to practice meditation in a standing position. In Tai Chi, the practice of meditation is an important way to become more aware of one's Qi. After months or years of practice, one may begin to feel the Qi flow with deep-breathing meditation exercises. This is internal energy or Qi. With further dedication, one can sense and control Qi without the assistance of deep-breathing exercises. An ancient Chinese folklore said, "If one practices martial arts without practicing meditation, when one gets to be old, it will be all in vain."

Tai Chi meditative exercises

When beginning, one uses imagination of Qi during the exercises. With repeated exercises, one can use the mind to control the Qi flow. One can even project Qi out of the body to defend oneself in martial art. The mind is considered as a commander, and the Qi is considered as a flag. Without the order of the commander, the flag will not fly [7]. Tai Chi practitioners who have not developed the feeling for Qi may not practice correctly or may not combine any meditative techniques with Tai Chi movements [8].

Application of Tai Chi exercises

The series of postures and slow movements of Tai Chi seem to benefit elderly individuals. Tai Chi exercises give people a sense of well-being; they seem to improve coordination and balance in older people. To some, Tai Chi is the best of all exercises for older people because it is done in a gentle, slow manner. Several research studies show the benefits of Tai Chi exercises in the elderly. Other studies are inconclusive.

Wang [9] used a graded exercise test with gas analysis conducted on a bicycle ergometer for each subject. He reported that Tai Chi boosts the circulation system of elderly men. This was a small study that did not have a control comparison between Tai Chi and convention exercises.

In another study, Wu [10] systematically reviewed, identified, and evaluated the efficacy of Tai Chi in its effects on postural stability and risks for falls in older people. He found the benefits of Tai Chi for these conditions remained unclear.

A pilot study by Lan et al [11] reported that Tai Chi exercises improve muscle strength and endurance in elderly persons. This was a small but promising study, which needs to be repeated on a larger scale to validate the beneficial effects of Tai Chi.

Adler et al [12] studied 16 men and women with chronic arthritis pain age 68 to 87. Subjects were assigned randomly to a Tai Chi group or a control group. The Tai Chi group attended 10 weekly 1-hour classes. The control group maintained normal daily activity. The investigators found the arthritic pain score levels in the group practicing Tai Chi for 10 weeks decreased from 3.25 to 1.75, whereas the control group without Tai Chi exercises reported a slight increase in pain. The investigators admitted, however, that there were no significant differences found in overall health and the use of analgesics between both groups.

Li et al [13] showed that 49 subjects who practiced Tai Chi for 1 hour twice a week for 6 months experienced 57% improvement in vigorous activities, 58% improvement in moderate activities, and 55% improvement in walking activities compared with a control group of 49 subjects who maintained their normal activities. There were some inconsistencies in the design of the study. Most subjects who participated in the study were white women, which may not reflect the US population accurately. In addition, all subjects who participated in the study were volunteers. These people might have been highly motivated compared with the normal population.

Shapira et al [14] published three case reports using Tai Chi as a rehabilitation method in severe trauma patients. These investigators found Tai Chi accelerated the patients' improvement in balance and muscle tone control. They advocated the use of Tai Chi, a body-and-mind exercise, as a cognitive rehabilitative tool. Because this was a small, uncontrolled study, it is impossible to show scientifically the beneficial role of Tai Chi in the patients' rehabilitation.

Look, a Tai Chi master at TIMA (Tri Internal Martial Art), and his students currently are studying the beneficial effects of Qi Gong and Tai Chi on multiple sclerosis, arthritis, osteoporosis, and visual problems (Henry Look, personal communication, 2003). Additionally, the National Institutes of Health has funded a study to examine whether Tai Chi can help patients with Parkinson's disease, a degenerative disease of the brain characterized by tremors, stiffness, and slowed movements.

Reiki

It is believed that Reiki is universal life energy flowing through the therapist that brings about healing. The therapist can use hands-on treatment or at times does not even have to touch patients to promote healing. The therapist does not do the healing, but acts as a conduit to allow the energy of the receiver to be attuned to the universal life energy, and healing occurs.

History of Reiki

Reiki was developed in Japan by Usui in the mid-1800s [15]. Usui was the head of a theology seminar in Kyoto, Japan. He was constantly perplexed by his students' question regarding the possibility of healing the body and the soul as the Bible states. He left school and traveled extensively in many countries, including the United States, to search for an answer. One day, he came up with a special idea while reading *Sanskrit Sutras*, a revered book in Sanskrit language, to activate and direct universal life energy in healing.

Usui went up the mountain Kurama-Yama in Japan and fasted, prayed, and meditated for 21 days. On the 21st day, he encountered a bright light, which struck him unconscious. He saw millions and millions of bubbles of different rainbow colors. Each white bubble came up to him and revealed to him some secrets until he learned all. After Usui learned the secrets of healing through the experience with the Bright Light, he went down the mountain and found he was able to heal many illnesses by hands-on treatments. Usui then went to a place where many beggars in Japan stayed. He performed healing treatment for the beggars for 7 years. He encouraged these beggars to start a new life after they were healed of physical illnesses. Usui found, however, that many of the beggars were resistant to the idea of starting a new life. They were healed physically but not spiritually, and they did not appreciate their healing.

Five principles of Reiki

Usui left the beggars and pondered on the spiritual aspects of healing. After many long days and nights of thinking, he formulated five principles

of Reiki. These five principles are important in any Reiki healing. They help to ensure long-lasting results and improvement in the clients or receivers:

1. Just for today I will give thanks to my many blessings.
2. Just for today I will not worry.
3. Just for today I will not be angry.
4. Just for today I will do my work honestly.
5. Just for today I will be kind to my neighbor and every living thing.

Lineage of Reiki

Usui traveled throughout Japan and taught energy healing called *Reiki*. He acquired 18 disciples who traveled and studied with him. When it was the time for the transition, he chose his most dedicated disciple, Chujiro Hayashi, to carry on this tradition. Hayashi continued to spread Reiki healing throughout Japan. He accepted Hawayo Takata, the first non-Japanese and first woman, to be his disciple. Hayashi died in 1941. Takata traveled and lectured extensively in the United States in the early 1970s. In 1976, she certified Virginia Sandahl as the first Occidental Reiki Master. Before her death in 1980, Takata had trained a total of 22 master teachers, including her granddaughter, Phyllis Furumoto, the current head of Reiki lineage [16].

Three degrees of Reiki

To become a First-Degree Reiki practitioner, one has to be initiated or attuned by a Reiki Master. After one has been initiated to the universal life energy, one can begin to do healing by hands-on method of touching himself or another person. The cost for initial attunement is around \$500.

To become a Second-Degree Reiki practitioner, one has to be working as a First-Degree Reiki practitioner at least 21 days. In some cases, this process can be shorter. The Second-Degree Reiki practitioner is allowed to do healing in person or at a distance. It also allows one to do special treatments for mental, emotional, and addictive problems.

After working 1 year as Second-Degree Reiki practitioner, if one is interested and if one has good recommendations, he or she can apply for Master Therapist or Third-Degree Reiki practitioner. After 1 year working as a Master Therapist, one can apply to be a Master Teacher. This level is reserved for individuals who dedicate their lives to teaching Reiki. The cost to become a Third-Degree Reiki is around \$10,000.

Application of Reiki, Qi Gong, and Tai Chi in conventional medicine

Additional studies are needed to prove the efficacy of Tai Chi exercises, but there is little or no potential harm in doing these slow-dance exercises

from China. On a higher level, some practitioners of Qi Gong claimed the abilities to heal many illnesses with Qi. In many instances, the practitioners do not have to touch the patient [17].

There is scanty research on Qi Gong, and most studies were done in China. Yang Fang, an acoustic scientist in Beijing, built a device to record the Qi signal. With this device, she was able to record the Qi signal of the novice and the Qi Gong master. It was found that the Qi signal in the infrasonic range of a Qi Gong master was 100 times stronger than of a normal, healthy person [18].

Reiki hands-on healing and Qi Gong healing are different. With Reiki healing, the practitioner can touch his or her clients during the healing sessions, but also can perform healing at a distance. The treatment seems simple, but it requires an experienced practitioner or Master before good results can be expected. There is potential for abuse in the healing practice. Many Reiki teachers ply their trade on street corners all over the world. They do not teach pure, true Reiki, but are interested only in financial gain [19]. Many people, especially Westerners, likely require a leap of faith to believe anyone can heal with the hands only.

As with other complementary therapies, Qi Gong healing and Reiki healing lack scientific research to prove their efficacy. Research of these therapies needs to be conducted before acceptance by the medical community can be attained. As a biologic researcher from Massachusetts General Hospital once said: “The issue is not how or why they work, but that they work.”

References

- [1] Maciocia G. *The foundation of Chinese medicine*. New York: Churchill Livingstone; 1996. p. 39–48.
- [2] McGee C. *Chow EFP: miracle healing from China*. Coeur d’Arlene: Medipress; 1994. p. 13–26.
- [3] Lien-Ying K, Guttman G. *The Tai Chi boxing chronicle*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books; p. 72–75.
- [4] Liao W. *Tai Chi classics*. Boston: Shambala; 1990. p. 5–15.
- [5] Shou-Yu L, Jwing-Ming Y, Hsing Yi C. *Theory and application*. Jamaica Plain (MA): YMAA Publication Center; 1990. p. 1–15.
- [6] Hsieh D. *Hsing-I Chuan*. Honolulu (HI): McLisa Enterprises; 1991. p. 1–7.
- [7] Liang TT. *Tai Chi Chuan for health and self defense*. New York: Vintage Books; 1977. p. 22–30.
- [8] Da L. *Tai Chi Chuan and meditation*. New York: Schocken Books; 1991. p. 73–77.
- [9] Wang SW. Tai Chi boots circulation of elderly men. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2001;82: 1176–80.
- [10] Wu G. Evaluation of the effectiveness of Tai Chi for improving balance and preventing falls in the older population—a review. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 2002;50:746–54.
- [11] Lan C, Lai JS, Chen SY, et al. Tai Chi Chuan to improve muscular strength and endurance in elderly individuals: a pilot study. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2000;81:604–7.
- [12] Adler P, Good M, Roberts B, et al. The effects of Tai Chi on older adults with chronic arthritis pain. *J Nursing Scholarship* 2000;32:377.

- [13] Li F, Harmer P, McAuley E, et al. An evaluation of the effects of Tai Chi exercises on physical function among older persons: a randomized controlled trial. *Ann Behav Med* 2001;23:139–46.
- [14] Shapira M, et al. Tai Chi Chuan practice as a tool for rehabilitation of severe head trauma: three case reports. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2001;82:1283–5.
- [15] Barnett L, Chambers H. Reiki energy medicine. Berkeley: Healing Art Press; 1996. p. 88–90.
- [16] Morris JJ. Reiki hands that heal. York Beach (ME): Weiser Books; 1999. p. 9–14.
- [17] Dong P, Raffill T. Empty force. Rockport (MA): Element; 1996. p. 58–66.
- [18] Lee RH. Scientific investigations into Chinese QiGong. Berkeley (CA): China Healthway Institute; 1992. p. 1–20.
- [19] Waites B, Master N. Reiki, a practical guide. Hodhasharon, Israel: Astrolog Publishing House; 1998. p. 27–9.

