

Clinical Applications of *Tai Ji Quan* and *Qi Gong* Principles

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Understanding the health-rejuvenating principles of *qi gong* (pronounced *chee kung*) and *tai ji* can be applied as an adjunct therapy to acupuncture. My interests in Daoist principles of health first began with the study of *tai ji quan*, which guided me to becoming an acupuncturist. After seven years of practicing *tai ji*, I soon discovered *qi gong* from Dr. [Yang Jwing-Ming](#) in Boston.

The romanized spellings of *tai ji quan* and *qi gong* has proven to be quite confusing. This spelling is based on the [Hanyu Pinyin](#) developed by the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China in 1954, which supersedes older romanized systems such as [Wade-Giles](#) (1859). I believe most people find the older Wade-Giles spelling - *tai chi chuan/chi kung* - easier to pronounce. *Tai ji quan* (pronounced *tai jee chuen*) translates as "grand ultimate fist." The word *fist* reveals the history of *tai ji* as a martial art. Today, it is more commonly practiced as a wellness exercise. Another translation of *tai ji* is "great extremes," in contrast to *wu ji* ("no extreme"). The *tai ji* form embodies the Daoist creation story. The form begins and ends in the *wu ji* posture - a state of emptiness. From emptiness comes the [ten thousand manifestations](#) - the "great extremes." All things return to the source - *wu ji*.

The word *qi* loosely translates into "energy," and *gong* means "time and effort." Therefore, *qi gong* can mean "the study of energy" or "energy work." When speaking of *qi gong*, it generally implies the study of energy associated with the human body but there are other forms of study. *Qi* is a life force that penetrates all manifestations, so any study on the natural flow of things can be considered *qi gong*. For example, astrology, meteorology, *feng shui*, geography and acupuncture are all forms of *qi gong*. *Tai ji quan* is also considered a form of *qi gong*. It emphasizes mental focus and breathing techniques with body movement or still meditation. *Qi gong* without mental focus and proper breathing techniques is more appropriately considered general exercise and not *qi gong*.

In *tai ji*, there are Five Regulatings: body, breath, mind, *qi* and spirit. Initial *qi gong* and *tai ji* training emphasizes the practice of regulating the body, breath and mind. *Qi* and spirit are often subjects of advance training. I often convey to my students and patients "good health is good circulation." Promoting calmness helps the *qi* circulate and the spirit consolidate. Many people have a hard time relaxing. Our fast-paced society doesn't encourage relaxation and calmness. Calmness does not come naturally and requires training.

Regulating the body to promote calmness requires an attention to postural alignment. Good posture requires minimal muscle contraction and minimal obstruction to circulation. Observing a patient's posture can add important details to a diagnosis. A forward-leaning posture will cause tightness and stagnation throughout the channels along the anterior aspect of the body. I often see this posture in patients who are aggressive, have a lean body type or have a fast-pace lifestyle. A rear-leaning posture will cause stagnation to posterior channels and is often displayed by patient's who tend towards

timidity, fearfulness or being overweight.

For my *tai ji* students, I bring awareness to postural imbalances by self-awareness and experience. When standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, carry your body weight through the center of the feet. Shifting your weight forward on the balls of your feet you begin to feel stagnation building up along the front of the body, especially in the lower legs. Shifting your weight backward on the heels, you can feel the backside tighten. Knowing the extremes, you can then find the center. Bending the knees slightly allows the lumbar muscles to relax. Locking the knees back impedes circulation in the Urinary Bladder channel and causes the lumbar region to tighten. Tilting the hips forward slightly also relaxes the lumbar region and opens the *Mingmen* (Life Gate). The lumbar curve opens when the hips are tilted forward. A large protruding abdomen causes the lumbar spine to extend forward, squeezing off the *qi* flow from the *Mingmen*. Obesity and low back pain often coincide. Standing tall to lengthen the spine allows maximum circulation through the channels of the torso; in particular the *Du* and *Chong Mai*. "Press the Heavens" (with the top of your head) is a wonderful *tai ji quan* expression that conveys an image of extending your spirit gently into the clouds. This elevates the spirit and promotes mental clarity. Finally in an effort to define good postural alignment, the shoulders should be relaxed. Test this by lifting your shoulders up and simply let them relax to check if you are holding any tension in your shoulders. While doing the *tai ji* form it is also important to create an egg-size space in the armpits to avoid obstruction in the Heart, Pericardium and Lung channels traversing across the chest.

In future articles, I will expound upon more principles of *tai ji*, *qi gong* and the Five Regulatings that can be used outside of the general practice of these exercises to benefit diagnosis and treatment protocols.

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