**Qigong 氣功**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Qigong** or **chi kung** (氣功) is the [Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) philosophy and practice of aligning breath, physical activity and [awareness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness) for mental, spiritual and corporeal health, as well as the development of human potential. It includes aspects of [Traditional Chinese Medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_Medicine), [Chinese martial arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_martial_arts), [Daoism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daoism) and [Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) and thus purportedly the spiritual awakening to one's true nature.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Etymology**

Qigong or Chi kung is an English form for two Chinese characters: *Qi* ([氣](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E6%B0%94)) and *gōng* ([功](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E5%8A%9F)). Dictionary definitions of *Qi* (or *chi*) usually involve "breath", "air", "gas" and "vapor" but it can also be used when describing the relationship between matter, energy and spirit. *Qi* (often in the form *chi*, especially in the West) is also known as a focus point for energy in Chinese (and Chinese-influenced) martial arts such as [kung fu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kung_fu), and often seen as an intrinsic life energy or vital force within living things. Definitions of the word *gong* (or *kung*) usually involve "force" or "power", with success implications like "achievement" and "results".

The two words are combined to describe systems and methods of cultivation and manipulation of this life energy, especially for health.

**Forms**

Different segments within Chinese society have derived a variety of forms of qigong.

The [traditional Chinese medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_medicine) community uses qigong for preventive and curative functions. The Chinese martial arts community considered qigong training an important component in enhancing martial abilities. The religious community, including both [Daoist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoist) and [Buddhist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist) traditions, uses qigong as part of their meditative practice. Confucian scholars practice qigong to improve their moral character.

In the 1940s and the 1950s, the Chinese government tried to integrate those disparate approaches into one coherent system with the intention of establishing firmer scientific bases for those practices and as part of the political philosophy of the [Cultural Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution). This attempt is considered by some [sinologists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinology) as the start of the modern or scientific interpretation of qigong.

Through the forces of migration of the [Chinese Diaspora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_diaspora), [tourism in China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_China) and [globalisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization), the practice of qigong has spread from the Chinese community to the world.

The practices of qigong are differentiated by four types of training: dynamic, static, meditative and activities requiring external aids. Dynamic training involves choreographed movement and applies to physical/mental disciplines such as Taiji Quan ([Tai chi chuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tai_chi_chuan)), [Baguazhang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baguazhang) and [Xing yi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xing_yi). Static training requires the practitioner to maintain the body in a particular posture. Meditative training utilizes visualization, mantra, philosophical concepts such as Qi circulation and breath awareness. There are also training methods that involve an external agent such as the ingestion of herbs, massages, physical manipulation or interactions with other living organisms. A qigong system can be composed of one or more types of training.

Qigong is sometimes considered to be part of [alternative medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine), with positive effects on various ailments according to some sources.

Some researchers are skeptical of qigong and label the subject matter a [pseudoscience](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience). In addition, the origin and nature of qigong practice has led to misconceptions and misuses, including psychiatric problems and the formation of [cults](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cults)

**History**

The ancient history of qigong is identified with the segment within Chinese society where the training is cultivated. Over time, the concept and practice of different types of qigong acquired similar philosophical bases. Within the last three decades, those exercises were explained from a scientific basis. The common thread throughout history is the increasing popularity of this system of mindful practice, which has spread throughout China and now across the world.

According to the traditional Chinese medical community, the origin of qigong is commonly attributed to the legendary [Yellow Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_Emperor) and the classic [Book of Internal Medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huangdi_Neijing).

Archeological evidence may suggest that the first forms of qigong can be linked to ancient shamanic meditative practice and gymnastic exercises. The [Mawangdui Silk Texts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawangdui_Silk_Texts) (168 [BCE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Era)) shows a series of [Dao Yin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tao_Yin) (導引) exercises that bears physical resemblance to some of the health exercises being practiced today. Shamanic rituals and ideas eventually evolved and formalized into Daoist beliefs and eventually incorporated into the field of traditional Chinese medicine.

Daoyin 導引 (a.k.a. Tao Yin), which literally means “guiding and stretching,” is a traditional Chinese form of “calisthenics” (Grk.: “beautiful strength”; physical exercise) or “gymnastics” (Grk.: “to train”). Traditionally and historically speaking, Daoyin practices are stretching exercises, usually combined with breath-work. Some Daoyin practices involve specific breathing (huxi 呼吸) patterns. The earliest forms of Daoyin were developed during the Early Han dynasty (206 BCE-8 CE), in the context of health and longevity as well as therapeutic movements. Daoyin practice is also sometimes referred to as Yangsheng 養生, which literally means “nourishing life.”

Some of the earliest sources on Daoyin include the Daoyin tu 導引圖 (Exercise Chart) and Yinshu 引書 (Stretching Book).

Modern Reconstruction of the Daoyin tu

Dating to around 168 BCE, the Daoyin tu was discovered in the burial materials of Mawangdui 馬王堆 (near Changsha; Hunan). It consists of forty-four color illustrations of human figures performing therapeutic exercises, with accompanying captions. The exercises involve standing in specific postures that aim to cure corresponding illnesses. Here it should be noted that the title of this series of illustrations was supplied by modern scholars. The Yinshu, which dates to around 186 BCE, is an archaeological manuscript discovered at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (Jiangling, Hubei). Lacking illustrations, it consists entirely of text. The second section describes about a hundred Daoyin exercises.

The earliest Daoist reference to Daoyin practice appears in chapter fifteen of the Zhuangzi 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuang), which is part of the so-called Outer Chapters (8-22) and is roughly contemporaneous with the Daoyin tu and Yinshu. “To practice chui 吹, xu 呴, hu 呼 and xi 吸 breathing, to expel the old (tugu 吐古) and ingest the new (naxin 納新), and to engage in bear-hangings (xiongjing 熊經) and bird-stretchings (niaoshen 鳥申), with longevity one’s only concern—such are the practices of Daoyin adepts, people who nourish their bodies and hope to live as long as Pengzu” (cf. Daode jing ch. 29). In this section of the Zhuangzi, Daoyin practitioners are grouped in a hierarchical ordering of five lower forms of practice. Such adepts are contrasted with the Daoist sage (shengren 聖人), who does not practice Daoyin but rather aims at mystical unification with the Dao through quietistic meditation. Nonetheless, the above passage from the Zhuangzi as well as the Daoyin tu and Yinshu are among the earliest predecessors for the later practices known as the Method of the Six Breaths (liuqi fa 六氣法), a.k.a. Six Healing Sounds, and the Five Animal Frolics (wuqin xi 五禽戲).

In later organized Daoism, Daoyin practice, especially in the form of stretching routines aimed at health and longevity, was eventually incorporated into larger Daoist training regimens. In those contexts, Daoyin was most often understood as a foundational and/or preliminary practice. A famous example is the seated Eight Brocades (baduan jin 八段錦). One of the earliest known presentations appears in the thirteenth-century Xiuzhen shishu 修真十書 (Ten Works on Cultivating Perfection; DZ 263). There the sequence of eight seated postures is a set of exorcistic and cleansing exercises that involves stretching, devotional activation of body gods, and meditations that serve to prepare practitioners for internal alchemy practice. It should be noted that seated Eight Brocades is different from the standing version, which seems to be of quite recent provenance. Both are rudimentary practices

In the Daoist tradition, the writings of [Lǎozǐ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laozi) ("Lao Tzu", ca. 400 BCE) and [Zhuāngzǐ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuangzi); ("Chuang Tzu", ca. 300 BCE) both describe meditative cultivation and physical exercises to extend one's lifespan and as means of accessing higher realms of existence. The Daoist inner alchemical cultivation around the Song Dynasty ([Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_language): 宋朝; [pinyin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinyin): *Sòng Cháo*; [Wade-Giles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wade-Giles): Sung Ch'ao; IPA: [[ sʊ̂ŋ tʂʰɑ̌ʊ̯ ]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPA_for_Mandarin)) between 960 and 1279, continued those Taoist traditions.

Buddhism, originating in [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) and having its source in the [Hindu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu) culture, has an extensive system of meditation and physical cultivation similar to [yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga) to help the practitioner achieve enlightenment. When Buddhism was transmitted to China, some of those practices were assimilated and eventually modified by the indigenous culture. The resulting transformation was the start of the Chinese Buddhist qigong tradition. Chinese Buddhist practice reaches a climax with the emergence of [Chán](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen) (禪) Buddhism in the 7th century AD. Meditative practice was emphasized and a series of qigong exercises known as the [Yijin Jing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yijin_Jing) ("Muscle/Tendon Change Classic") was attributed to [Bodhidharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhidharma). The Chinese martial arts community eventually identify this Yijing Jing as one of the secret training methods in [Shaolin martial arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaolin_Kung_Fu).

Chinese scholars acknowledged [Kǒngzǐ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius) ("Confucius", 551–479 BCE) and [Mèngzǐ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mencius) ("Mencius", 385–302 BCE) as the founders of the Scholar qigong tradition. In their writings, they alluded to the concepts of Qi training as methods of moral training.

Chinese martial arts influenced by all the different elements within Chinese society adapted and modified qigong theory with the goal of improving their fighting abilities. Many Chinese martial arts paid homage to Taoism or Buddhism by claiming them as their original source. For example, Tai chi chuan is often described as being Taoist in origin. Shaolin martial arts are named after the famous Buddhist Shaolin temple.

The exchange of ideas between those different segments within Chinese society created rich, complex and sometimes contradictory theory and methods of training. The difficulty in determining the correct training method, the traditional “Master-student” method of transmission and the belief that qigong represents a special and valuable knowledge limited the research and development of qigong to small but elite elements within Chinese society. Specialized texts were available but were secretive and cryptic and therefore limited to a selective few. For the general population, qigong practice was a component of traditional Chinese medicine. This medical system was developed based on experience, along with religious, demonological and magical practices.

The nature and values of Chinese society changed radically with the arrival and dissemination of Western ideas, technology and culture starting from the 16th century. In the declining period of the [Qing dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qing_dynasty) (1644–1912), the entire Chinese philosophy and culture was re-examined. Chinese medicine, as part of the Chinese tradition, was re-evaluated in response to the effectiveness of Western medicine. The conflict between the Eastern and Western approaches reached a crisis point at the beginning of the Republican period. Larger segments within Chinese society begin to openly challenge traditional Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism and advocated the wholesale adoption of Western principles. In response, many nationalists counter by pointing out the limitation of Western society and the success of Chinese ideas such as TCM and qigong. The result was a great deal of publications and writings promoting Chinese cultural practice such as qigong and introduces those ideas to the general population. These conflicting worldviews will shape the development of qigong.

During the turmoil of the fall of the Qing Dynasty and through to the [Republican Period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Republic_of_China) (1912–49), Chinese society was fighting for its own survival and there was very little thought on the development of qigong.

Concerted efforts to re-establish Chinese culture under a new ideology begin after the creation of the [People’s Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China) in 1945. The new ruling government under the leadership of [Mao Zedong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mao_Zedong) rejected all ties to traditional Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Instead, the Chinese government promoted a socialist view. Through a series of government directed programs that lasted for nearly three decades (1949–1976), the entire fabric of Chinese society was torn apart and reorganised. It is in this environment that the current attitude to qigong in the Mainland was born.

Mao Zedong himself recognized the conflicting aims between the rejection of [feudalistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalistic) ideas of the past and the benefits derived from those ideas. Traditional Chinese medicine was a clear example of this conflict. His solution can be summarized by his famous phrase “Chinese medicine is a great treasure house! We must make efforts to uncover it and raise its standards!” which legitimized the practice of Traditional Chinese medicine and created an impetus to develop a scientific base for traditional Chinese medicine. The subject of qigong under went a similar process of transformation. The historical elements of qigong were stripped to create a more scientific base for the practice.

In the early 1950s, Liu Guizhen (劉貴珍) (1920–83), a doctor by training, used his family’s method of body cultivation to successfully cure himself of various aliments. He then promoted his method to his patients and eventually published a book in 1953, “Practice in Qigong Therapy” Qi Gong liaofa shiyan (氣功療法實驗) to promote his successes, in 1953. His efforts to re-define qigong without a religious or philosophical context proved to be acceptable to the ruling government. The popularity and success of Liu’s book and the government’s strong support for Traditional Chinese medicine resulted in the formation of Qigong department within Universities and hospitals that practiced Traditional Chinese medicine. As a result, the first institutional support for qigong was established across China but this practice remained under tight control and had limited access to the general public.

In the late 1970s, with the fall of the [Gang of Four](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gang_of_Four) and the start [Era of Reconstruction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China_(1976%E2%80%931989)), there was a new openness in Chinese society. The practice of qigong has spread from a institutional setting to a popular movement based on charismatic promoters. Guo Lin (郭林), a Beijing artist who claimed to have cured herself of uterine cancer in the 1960s, was one of the first qigong masters to teach qigong openly to the general public outside an institutional setting. Scientists, free from the repression of the Cultural Revolution were able to seek new challenges. Among some of the new subjects they studied was the effect of qigong in order to provide a scientific base for this practice. In 1979, Gu Hansen of the Shanghai Institute of Atomic Research first reported on the external measurement of Qi. This research proved to be critical in promoting the notion of a science bases for qigong. Other reports of external evidence of Qi quickly followed. Other forms of measurements, personal testimonies on the effectiveness of qigong treatment and demonstration of the uses of qigong found in the martial arts were used to illustrate the practical realities of the qigong.

In the early 1980s, the enthusiasm for this new external Qi paradigm eventually leads to the use of Qi as an explanation for [paranormal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranormal) abilities such as [Extrasensory perception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extrasensory_perception) (ESP) and [psycho kinesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychokinesis). The increasingly exaggerated claims of qigong practice prompted some elements within the Chinese government to warn of the dangers of this paranormal craze and the prevalence of pseudo scientific beliefs. Leading public figures [Qian Xuesen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qian_Xuesen) (钱学森), eminent scientist and founder of Chinese Rocketry and [Zhang Zhenhuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhang_Zhenhuan) (张震寰) a former general, rushed to defend qigong practice. They champion the view of qigong as being a new science of the mind. A compromise on the support of qigong activities was eventually reached by various fractions within the Chinese government. Qigong activity was to be regulated with the establishment of the China Qigong Scientific Research Association was formed under the leadership of Zhang Zhenhuan and overt criticism of the paranormal research was to be muted.

By the middle of the 1980s, there were already 2000 qigong organisations and between 60 and 200 million practitioners across China. This represented almost one fifth of the Chinese population. This growth was fueled by the tacit support of small elements within the Chinese government, the reduced criticism of qigong practice, the pent-up demand within Chinese society for alternative belief systems and the improved methods of communication resulted in mass adaptation of qigong practice. By the end of the 1980s, the qigong practices could be found within all segments of Chinese society.

By the end of the 1990s, the explosive growth in the number of qigong practitioners had led to the revival of the old traditions that accompanied qigong development. Qigong organisations such as the [Falun Gong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falun_Gong) now know as Falun Dafa re-introduced moral and religious elements associated with their training methods. Such practices eventually led to a direct conflict with the central authorities. By 1999, there was a systematic crackdown on qigong organizations that were perceived to be challenging the State’s control over Chinese society. Since the crackdown, qigong research and practice are officially supported only in the context of health functions and as a field of study within traditional Chinese medicine.

Migration, travel and exploration were the first reasons for the spread of qigong practice beyond the Chinese community. Occidental societies first encounter qigong concepts through exposure to traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese philosophy or the Chinese martial arts.

It was not until the opening of China with the [visit of President Nixon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1972_Nixon_visit_to_China) in 1972 and the subsequent exchanges between China and the West that Western society became aware of the promise of qigong practice. The ideas of qigong was quickly embraced by alternative health care practitioners The idea of qi as a form of living energy also found a receptive audience within the [New Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age) movement. When the Chinese qigong community started to report cases of paranormal activity, Western researchers in the field were also excited by those findings. Chinese findings were reviewed and some qigong practitioners were invited to the West to demonstrate those results.

The American public’s first exposure the qigong was in the PBS series *Healing and the Mind* with [Bill Moyers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Moyers) in 1993. In the documentary, Moyers provided an in-depth look at healing alternatives to Western medicine and introduced the audience to the success of traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture and qigong. As a result, qigong practice spread to the general public.

Today, millions of people around the world practice qigong and believe in the potential benefits of qigong in varying degrees. Similar to its historical origin, those interested in qigong come from diverse backgrounds and practice it for different reasons.

**Theory**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BRASILRIO4.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.17/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BRASILRIO4.jpg)

Qigong practitioners in [Brazil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil)

The central idea in qigong practice is the control and manipulation of Qi, a form of energy. Similar representations of this Qi concept can be found in other cultures for example, [Prana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prana) in [Vedantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedantic) philosophy, [mana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mana) in Hawaiian culture, [Lüng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lung_(Tibetan_Buddhism)) in Tibetan Buddhism and [Vital energy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitalism) in Western thoughts. Some elements of this idea can be understood in the term [energy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_(esotericism)) when used by writers and practitioners of various esoteric forms of spirituality and alternative medicine. Some elements of the Qi concept can be found in popular culture. For example, [The Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Force_(Star_Wars)) in [Star Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars) movies has many Qi like qualities.

The concept of Qi as a form of pervasive energy is a fundamental pillar of [Chinese Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Philosophy). This energy is considered to exist in all things including the air, water, food, and sunlight. In the body, Qi represents the unseen vital force that sustains life. Qigong practice involves the manipulation and balance of the Qi within the practitioner’s body and its interaction with the practitioner’s surroundings. The method and ultimate objective for the practice is dependent on the practitioner.

Traditionally, qigong training has been thought of as being esoteric and secretive. Over the centuries, the exchange of ideas between various elements within Chinese society has created a unified overview of qigong practice even though each segment maintains its own detailed interpretations and methods.

A person is considered to have been born with original amounts of Qi. A person acquires Qi from the food by eating, from the air by breathing and from interacting with their environment. A person becomes ill or dies when the amount or type of Qi is unbalanced within the body. The practice of qigong is to regulate and control the Qi within the body.

In broad terms, according to Daoist and Buddhist philosophy, the regulation of Qi is through three interconnected components: the Mind (心), the Body (身) and the Spirit (靈). For Buddhists, the training of the mind is through meditation, contemplation and special exercises. For some Taoists, the training and regulation also include external agents such as the ingestion of herbs and interactions with others. For Confucius scholars the training involved the principle of cultivating *virtue* (*de* or *te* 德”) with virtue being defined according to a Confucian ideal.

The development of traditional Chinese medicine added more details to the role of Qi within the human body. In this system, Qi travels through the body along twelve main [meridians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meridian_(Chinese_medicine)) channels and numerous smaller branches and tributaries. Those main meridians also correspond to [twelve main organs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zang_Fu): the lung, large intestines, stomach, spleen, heart, small intestine, urinary bladder, kidney, liver, gallbladder, pericardium, and the ‘‘triple warmer,’’ which represents the entire torso region. The amount and flow of Qi is affected by a person’s emotional state which is ultimately related to the Mind, the Body and the Spirit. Most qigong practices use this concept of proper Qi flow through those meridians as a basic premise.

All elements within Chinese society accept the importance of [“Yin” and “Yang”](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang) or balance between complementary principles. This view suggests that two forces are always interacting, opposing, and influencing each other. As a result, it is not possible or desirable to eliminate one of those forces. The ideal situation is to seek a balance between those opposing forces. This concept is also applied in qigong theories. For example, the organs within the body are classified in terms of “Fire” ([Yang organs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zang-fu#Yang_organs)) and “Water” ([Yin organs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zang-fu#Yin_organs)), one of the goals in qigong practice is to balance the Qi between those opposing organs. Other theories, such as the [Five Elements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_Xing) (Wu Xing, 五行), provide even more details to explain the role and effect of Qi within the human body.

Historically, the effect of qigong practice has always been subjective. It ranges from a feeling of calmness and peacefulness to a sense of well being. Throughout history, remarkable claims have also been made as a result of qigong practice. The journey towards self-enlightenment can include descriptions of out of body experiences and miraculous powers for both the Buddhist and the Daoist. For some individuals, qigong training is seen as providing a curative function after extensive training. For martial artists, qigong training is credited as the basis for developing extraordinary powers such as the ability to withstand blows and the ability to break hard objects.

In the early 1980s, the Chinese scientific community attempted to verify the principles of Qi through external measurements. Initially, they reported great success suggesting that Qi can be measured as a form of electrical magnetic radiation. Other reports indicate that Qi can induce external effects such as changing the properties of a liquid, clairvoyance, and telekinesis. Those reports created great excitement within the paranormal and Para Psychological research communities.

However, those reports were severely criticized by the conventional scientific community both within China and outside of China. The main criticism from the conventional scientific establishment about qigong research is the lack of application of the principles of the [scientific method](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method) notably the absence of scientific rigor, the small sample sizes, the uncontrolled testing environment and lack of reproducibility. In addition to those criticisms, the public acceptance of paranormal properties arising from qigong practice contributed to social unrest.

As a result of those controversies, the emphasis on qigong research within Mainland Chinas has changed from externally verifying the existence of Qi to focus on effects on health and as a component of Traditional Chinese Medicine without any reference to other aspects of traditional qigong practice.

In contrast, Western society has accepted the spiritual elements of qigong practice and pays homage to its rich past. The Buddhist, Daoist, TCM or Wushu – Chinese Martial Arts origins are recognized and used as justification for its effectiveness. Given this acceptance, qigong practice becomes an important tool for improving one’s health.

Similar to the subject of efficacy of Traditional Chinese medicine, the chasm between the Eastern tradition of Qi and the Western scientific viewpoints are not insurmountable if the analysis is limited to the effect of qigong practice on biological processes without demanding a material interpretation of Qi. There is convincing argument to view as the concept of Qi as a [metaphor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor) for certain biological processes. The effectiveness of qigong can also be explained in terms of concepts more familiar to Western medicine such as [stress management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_management), [biofeedback](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biofeedback) and [neurology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurology).

**Practice**

Qigong is not just a set of breathing exercises as it encompasses a large variety of both physical and mental training methods designed to help the body and the mind based on Chinese philosophy. The implementation details vary between teachers, schools and the objective of the practitioner. A qigong system consists of one or more of the following types of training; dynamic, static, and meditative activities requiring external aids. Each type of training originated from different elements within Chinese society and emphasises different aspects of qigong theory.

**Dynamic Qigong**

Dynamic qigong can be easily recognized as a series of carefully choreographed movements or gestures that are designed to promote and manipulate the flow of Qi within the practitioner’s body. Taiji Quan ([T'ai Chi Chuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%27ai_Chi_Chuan)), a Wushu - Chinese martial art, is one well-known representation of dynamic qigong. Other examples include five animal frolics or, White Crane Qigong, Wild Goose (Dayan) Qigong where the practitioner performs movements to mimic motions of animals. To an external observer, the series of movements are similar to [calisthenics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calisthenics) or other types of athletic endeavor. To the qigong practitioner, the practice requires a unity of mind, body and spirit with the aim of promoting and controlling the flow of Qi.

**Static Qigong**

Static qigong is performed by holding a certain posture, position or stance for a period of time. In some cases, static qigong bears some similarities to the practice of [Yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga) and its continuation in the Buddhist tradition. [Yiquan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiquan), a Chinese martial art derived from [Xingyiquan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xingyiquan), is a strong proponent of stance training. Eight pieces of brocade ([Baduanjin qigong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baduanjin_qigong)), a well known set of health exercises, is also based on a series of postures. To the external observer, the practitioner appears to be fixed in space. To the qigong practitioner, the physical and mental effort required to keep the posture results in the appropriate manipulation of Qi.

**Meditative Qigong**

Most qigong training will involve some form of meditation. [Meditation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation) is a popular method of mind body training and can be found in many different cultures. The details of qigong practice will differ depending on the origins of the meditation tradition. In Confucius scholar tradition, the meditation is focused on humanity and virtue with the aim of self-enlightenment. In one of the Buddhist methods, the aim is perhaps to still the mind, either through a focus outward such as a place, inwards such as the breath, a mantra, a koan, emptiness or the idea of the eternal as represented by a Buddha. In Daoist and TCM tradition, meditative qigong seeks to lead Qi through the proper meridian pathways with the aim of completing a smooth continuous flow of Qi through the practitioner.

**Qigong with external agents**

Many systems of qigong training include the use of external agents. In Medical and Daoist methods, specialized food and drinks are prescribed to aid in the manipulation of Qi. In martial arts qigong, the use of massage and various other forms of body conditioning are used to promote Qi flow. In some qigong systems, a qigong master can emit Qi or manipulate the flow of Qi within the practitioner as a form of treatment or to guide the flow of Qi.

**Applications**

People practice qigong for many different purposes and those objectives determine the choice of qigong system. Although the benefits of qigong are numerous, the main reasons that people practice qigong are for their health, as a means of self cultivation and as part of their Wushu - [Chinese martial arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_martial_arts) training.

**Health**

Although not proven conclusively from a Western Medical stand point, qigong is an accepted treatment option in the fields of complementary and alternative medicine. Qigong treatment is also used extensively in China as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine and has been included in the curriculum of Chinese universities. Qigong practice serves both a preventive and curative function. It is considered to be effective in improving the effects of many chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, allergy, asthma, arthritis, degenerative disk disease, cancer, depression, irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety and addiction. Qigong works by improving the practitioners’ immunity response, increasing a person’s self-healing and self-recovery capabilities and enhancing one’s self-regeneration potential.

The major uses of qigong therapy are:

Each of these exercises represents a standard for general health qigong practice.

**Self-cultivation**

Self-cultivation has many meanings and goals depending on the context. In terms of tradition Chinese philosophy, self cultivation methods can be classified as

* Confucian. The method represents a way for the practitioner to become a [Junzi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junzi) (君子, pinyin: Jūnzǐ) through awareness of one’s morality.
* Daoist. The method represents a means to achieve longevity and spiritual enlightenment.
* Buddhist. The method is understood to be spiritual paths that eventually lead to [Buddhahood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhahood).

**Wushu - Martial arts**

The practice of qigong is an important component in Chinese martial arts. It is considered to be a source of power as well as the foundation or the internal style of martial arts. Tai chi chuan, Xing yi and Baguazhang are representative of the type of Chinese martial art that relies on the concept of Qi as its foundation. Extraordinary feats of martial arts prowess such as the ability to withstand heavy strikes ([Iron Shirt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Shirt), 鐵衫) and the ability to break hard objects ([Iron Palm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Palm), 铁掌) are abilities attributed directly to qigong training.

**Criticisms and controversies**

**Skeptics**

There is little controversy in the benefit of qigong when the definition of qigong is limited to a series of physical movements and a set of relaxation exercises. Conflict arises between Western views and qigong systems when the claims of qigong practice exceed the capabilities and understanding of traditional science and at an extreme make claims that border on the supernatural.

The same [skepticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skepticism) towards qigong practice can also be applied to the field of [Traditional Chinese medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_medicine) and extends to the broader subject of [alternative medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine) and complementary medicine. The basic problem is that the information available from those fields does not fit the Western paradigm suitable for scientific acceptability or medical interpretation. Skeptics contend that most of the benefits derived from Alternative medicine are, at best, derived from a [placebo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Placebo) effect. The main arguments from the view of skeptics against the correlation between qigong practices and health-related results are:

* The existence of Qi has not been independently verified in a experimental setting to the satisfaction of the general scientific community. Such a concept is not recognised in traditional biological sciences.
* Demonstrations in martial arts such as breaking hard objects with strikes can be fully explained using physics, without reference to the concept of Qi.
* Reported claims of supernatural abilities appear to be tricks more suited to magic shows than to any genuine scientific discipline.
* Explanations that involve the supernatural or that require a spiritual element are beyond the scope of the scientific method.
* Personal benefits for some qigong masters might have provided them with an incentive to exaggerate their claims

**Mental disorders**

In some cases, the practice of qigong can result in [mental disorders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_disorders). Within the qigong community, this condition is known as *Zouhuo rumo* (走火入魔) or "qigong deviation" (氣功偏差) and is characterized by the perception of the practitioner that there is an uncontrolled flow of Qi in the body. Other complaints include localized pains, headache, insomnia and uncontrolled spontaneous movements.

In the second edition of the [Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Classification_of_Mental_Disorders) (CCMD-2) published by the [Chinese Society of Psychiatry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Society_of_Psychiatry) the diagnosis of “Qigong Deviation Syndrome” is based upon the following criteria:

1. The subject being demonstrably-normal before doing qigong exercises
2. Psychological and physiological reactions appearing during or after qigong exercises (suggestion and autosuggestion may play an important role in these reactions)
3. Complaints of abnormal sensations during or after qigong exercises
4. Diagnostic criteria do not meet other mental disorders such as schizophrenia, affective disorder and neuroses.

In the west, there was no equivalent experience until the adoption of qigong practices by the public. When the western medical community encountered abnormal conditions presenting in patients practicing qigong, they used the term [Qi-gong psychotic reaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qi-gong_psychotic_reaction) and classified the disorder as a [culture-bound syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture-bound_syndrome) in the 4th edition of the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diagnostic_and_Statistical_Manual) (DSM-IV) of the [American Psychiatric Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Psychiatric_Association). It is described as: "A term describing an acute, time-limited episode characterised by dissociative, paranoid or other psychotic or non-psychotic symptoms that may occur after participation in the Chinese folk health-enhancing practice of qigong. Especially vulnerable are individuals who become overly involved in the practice."

The DSM-IV classification has been criticized by other Western psychiatrists on the grounds that "It is not clear how the architects of the DSM-IV can logically defend labeling a syndrome as aberrant in the context of a diagnostic system while simultaneously placing that syndrome outside of conventional Western [nosologic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nosologic) categories that serve as basis for determining whether a syndrome is or is not aberrant and therefore a disorder." In most cases in China, the psychiatrists do not use the psychosis terminology however, preferring "qigong deviation".

Within the qigong community, Qigong Deviation is believed to be caused by:

* An inexperienced or unqualified instructor
* Incorrect instructions
* Impatience
* Becoming frightened, irritated, confused or suspicious during the course of qigong practice, or
* Inappropriate manipulation or channeling of Qi.

In cases of psychosis, the Western psychiatric view is that qigong is a precipitating stressor of a latent psychotic disorder to which the patient is predisposed, rather than erroneous qigong practice; a type of reactive psychosis or the precipitation of an underlying mental illness, such as [schizophrenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schizophrenia), [bipolar disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bipolar_disorder), or [posttraumatic stress disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posttraumatic_stress_disorder). The Chinese medical literature includes a wider variety of symptoms associated with qigong deviation; the non-psychotic symptoms correspond to [conversion disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_disorder) and [histrionic personality disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histrionic_personality_disorder) in Western classifications.

Within the qigong community, there are specific treatments for addressing different forms of qigong deviations. In western psychiatry, the use of an [antipsychotic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipsychotic) may be prescribed.

[Kundalini syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kundalini_syndrome) is another set of physical and psychological disorder attributed to meditation.