



Journal of Health and Medical Sciences

Akman, M. Kubilay. (2018), Socio-Cultural Analysis on Baduanjin Qigong: Form and Techniques of the Chinese Traditional Exercise System. In: *Journal of Health and Medical Sciences*, Vol.1, No.1, 50-64.

ISSN 2622-7258

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1994.01.01.7

The online version of this article can be found at:

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Published by:
The Asian Institute of Research

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Socio-Cultural Analysis on Baduanjin Qigong: Form and Techniques of the Chinese Traditional Exercise System

Dr. M. Kubilay Akman¹

^{1,2,3} Sociologist, academic, traditional Chinese martial arts and Neigong instructor. Head of the Sociology Department at Uşak University, Turkey. E-mail: kubilayakman@gmail.com

Abstract

Qigong is a traditional Chinese exercise system which has many forms and techniques used, applied for health benefits from ancient times to contemporary societies. Globalization and widespread of cultural elements internationally have contributed positively for Qigong practice's being known more in the West. There are many researches that have been conducted on medical, health aspects of practicing Qigong. In this article the subject is Baduanjin Qigong (Eight Section Brocade) and its socio-cultural dimensions which is going to be discussed from several views. A comprehensive model of Baduanjin will be given and this can be functional to practitioners of Asian martial arts, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and also academics in social sciences, humanities and cultural studies.

Keywords: Neigong, Qigong, Baduanjin, TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine), Chinese Martial Arts, Meridians, Sociology of Culture

1. Introduction

Qigong¹ is a traditional exercise system of “energy work” which has been practiced in Chinese civilization for over 5000 years (Holder) (Jahnke, 2010: 2). It is an “internal art” (Neigong, 內功) and focuses on TCM's (Traditional Chinese Medicine) cultural and philosophical concepts of meridians, acupuncture, Etc. rather than to be a heavily physical exercise. Because of this reason the practice and techniques associated with Qigong are “soft”, emphasizing smooth and harmonious movements.



Image 1: An ancient illustration shows a Qigong technique (Holder)

¹ Qigong with traditional Chinese characters: 氣功

Baduanjin (八段錦) is among the most common and widely used forms of Qigong (besides 5 Animals Form) and has a known historical background going back to the Song Dynasty (10th-13th Century), with much older origins. It has evolved, changed from some aspects when we look at to the ancient manuscripts and contemporary applications. However, it should be admitted that there is a lot common in all forms and variations of Baduanjin in conceptual level.

In this article, we are going to focus first on “energy” (Chi or Qi) aspects of Qigong, its socio-cultural representations and interdisciplinary analyses on this traditional exercise system. After that, we will focus more particularly on Baduanjin. Our article will provide a philosophical, socio-cultural and practical understanding of Baduanjin Qigong. The results of this research can be followed in two lines: 1. In academic way, Baduanjin can be investigated further through an interdisciplinary perspective (sociology, philosophy, Chinese studies, Asian studies, health sciences, Etc.) 2. On a practitioner level, based on the techniques provided here you can continue your Qigong practices for possible health benefits.²



Image 2: with Sifu Peter Ziboce (in Hong Kong)

Before going further, this can be right time to mention the Neigong experience of the author of this article: although my background in internal martial arts (Tai Chi Chuan, Xingyiquan, Yiquan) and Qigong is coming from lineages of several sifus (masters), two of my teachers, Sifu Shi Dan Qiu and Sifu Peter Ziboce have had a major role in my learning the theory and concepts of traditional Chinese arts. My study and training under Sifu Peter Ziboce in Hong Kong have opened important doors theoretically and philosophically towards understanding Qigong in general, Baduanjin particularly.

2. Qigong as a traditional system focusing on “energy”

Qigong is defined as a practice “cultivating a relationship with energy - becoming aware of the energy that circulates and flows through your being” (Draffan, 2009: 3). Of course what we call “qi” would be considered, analyzed and perceived different from medical, biological, sociological and socio-cultural views and methodologies. The same phenomenon has different variations and appearances in prisms of different disciplines.

In Chinese culture, from history to contemporary days, Qigong has had thousands of different forms, based on various teachers and traditions; “Some of these forms were designed for general health-enhancement purposes” while some others “for specific TCM diagnostic categories. Some were originally developed as rituals for spiritual practice, and others to empower greater skill in the martial arts” (Jahnke, 2010: 2-3). Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and martial arts have been two dominant fields for Qigong practitioners.

² For this practice or any kind of exercise you should consult your physician regarding if you can do it or which kind of physical activity suits best for your needs. Author has no responsibility for the results of your physical exercises. Baduanjin Qigong and all kinds of Neigong or other exercises must be practiced under the guidance of qualified and certified instructors. Readers of this article can contact via my email address for participating the Qigong Workshop where I will teach, in 2019 Summer, Istanbul.

Qigong is considered as “an ancient Chinese self-healing mind-body exercise and it contains meditation, breathing, body posture, and gentle movement” (Chan, 2014: 2). From these aspects “meditation” and soft physical activity take place at the same time in this system. As it is well known, usually when meditation is thought (for instance in Zen) a non-moving, mostly sitting concentrations are understood. Of course, even in Zen or other Buddhist ways there are different, moving variations of meditation. However, the most common one is seated meditation. Qigong is combining meditating, breath activities and body movements.

According to Chinese traditional way of thinking and philosophy Qi is understood as “the energy and natural force that fills the universe” and “three major powers” have been accepted to exist in the universe: heaven, earth and man (Yang, 2016: 93). Qigong is trying to improve “the cultivation of balance and harmony of Qi, positively influencing the human energy complex (Qi channels/pathways) that functions as a holistic, coherent, and mutually interactive system” (Jahnke, 2010: 3). This “interactive” model creates also interaction between practitioner, heaven and earth, at least in philosophical conceptions of the tradition.

Yong Tai Wang (University of Texas at Tyler) and his colleagues stated that “considerable scientific evidence supports the health benefits of practicing Tai Chi and Qigong in various populations with differing characteristics such as age, gender, and occupation in NIH³ Research Report” (Wang, 2017: 1). There is a significant amount of medical & health studies publications on benefits of Qigong. In this article we will mention some of them to give an idea, which can be also covered in other researches on medical sociology. However, our main point will be to provide coherent knowledge of Baduanjin.

A qualitative research on elder Tai Chi and Qigong practitioners showed that each person “had his or her own unique experience of Taiji and Qigong there were strong commonalities” among practitioners interviewed: “All began with motivations related to physical problems and concerns, and, all reported significant functional improvement”; they also said “experiencing benefits in at least three other dimensions, and all reported integrated mind-body experiences that were, in their own subjective assessments, powerful and unexpected” (Yang, 2011: 9). Finally all respondents of the research “felt that these complex integrative experiences were the most important and meaningful outcome of their participation in Taiji. And so as they practiced Taiji and experienced more complex benefits, their motivations to continue shifted accordingly” (Yang, 2011: 9). These results of the research shows perceived and individually experienced satisfaction of Nei Gong practice.

Qigong as “an art of moving qi/chi (vital life energy) through the body, releasing energy blocks, and eliminating causes of illness and imbalance” (Chyu, 2011: 6) has been used for complementary cure of several health problems, including arthritis. Scientific researches show that Qigong and similar exercises “may reduce arthritic pain, enhance physical functioning and flexibility, and improve self-efficacy and quality of life in OA patients” (Chyu, 2011: 8). Another problem on which there is healing influence of Qigong is chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). In 2010, 1441 adults with CFS symptoms recruited for a research (Li, 2015: 2). The study showed that Qigong helped people suffering from CFS-like illness. Comparison between a Qigong practicing group and the control group proved that Qigong practice contributes positively to the health (Li, 2015: 5). When Qigong is practiced for a while the participants had “a significant decrease in negative physical symptoms” and this result is very “consistent with the results of previous studies, which have found similar effects of Qigong on physical health among patients with chronic illnesses and with CFS-like illnesses (Li, 2015: 5). This is just another example among many which show positive health contributions of Qigong practice.

The “energy theory” of TCM and related cultural elements has two contributing components: the concept of yin&yang and five elements idea/theory. TCM is related to these concepts and seeking balance, harmony between internal organs which represent different parts of this whole picture (Klein, 2017: 3). Meridians are channels of “Qi circulation” and they include “12 major meridians and 8 curious meridians”. Modern science showed “schematics of the major meridians and the direction of flow paths have been generated by recording micro electrical differentials at points on the skin identified as acupuncture points” (Klein, 2017: 3), which is an advanced contribution to TCM.

³ National Institutes of Health, USA <https://www.nih.gov>

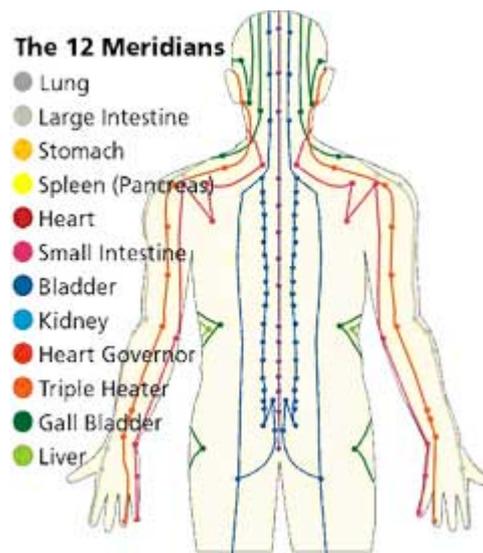


Image 3: 12 major meridians⁴

Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, traditions have Qigong elements for health benefits in their socio-cultural production of meaning, life and society. Even the most common Qigong forms such as Baduanjin take place in both Taoist and Buddhist temples like Shaolin and Wudang. Since it has ancient origins in Chinese civilization it is possible to understand the existence of Qigong in other, different lines of culture, religion and philosophy.

Wu I-Ying, as a modern scholar and Qigong practitioner in Taoist way stated: “I am aware of qi as a vital energy that is inherent, implicit and necessary in my body and movement and particularly related to a state of being” (Wu, 2014: 3). She also explained that “According to Daoist qigong, the physical and spiritual join together in movement as one entity” which cause practitioner to feel “sense of qi by being in the in-between”; in this “in-between state of qi” a practitioner may be aware of his/her muscles’, bones’ and nervous system’s working, after the feeling of an “unknown sense”, which is “like an alternative material shifting” in the body (Wu, 2014: 70). Of course what is felt can be differed from one person to other ones, however the general frame of the experience would be not so different in essence.

Taoist way of thinking and Qigong practice overlap from several aspects. Taoist Qigong has a holistic approach and mentions three sources of energy in body. These are: 1. “light” (Qi) which can take place symbolically between two eyes, “upper dan tian” as the third eye, it is about “wisdom” in Tao; 2. “light” can be around the abdomen, “lower dan tian” and may direct to the feeling of calmness; 3. “light” can be the heart, “middle dan tian”, which can contribute to awareness (Wu, 2014: 80-81). Qigong is practiced as a way to harmonize these energies holistically, create balance inside human body, mind and his/her existence in the universe. Qigong exists of organized, meaningful and physically relaxing movements which match with higher philosophical concepts in a psychological level. It is an exercise system emerged sociologically, conveyed through generations historically and spread socio-culturally in contemporary world.

Buddhist temples, especially Shaolin Temple also have Baduanjin in their curriculum. Since Shaolin Kung Fu is a highly external art and requires a lot of hard physical exercises, the gentle and soft nature of Qi cultivation in Eight Section Brocades Qigong create a good balance towards harmonization between external and internal powers. Shaolin Kung Fu masters even created and published great instructional DVD’s to promote and teach Baduanjin.

⁴ "Meridians in Traditional Chinese Medicine?", Acupuncture & Massage College AMC-Miami, Florida, <https://www.amcollege.edu/blog/what-are-meridians-in-traditional-chinese-medicine-tcm> (retrieved: 09.10.2018)



Image 4-5: DVD covers of Shaolin Baduanjin

Songshan Shaolin Eight-Section Brocade Exercise DVD of Master Shi DeQian (published by Zhongchuan Culture) and Shaolin Baduanjin DVD of 31st generation successor Master Shi Deyang (published by People's Sports Video Publishing House) are among important, original, historical records of how kind of Baduanjin practices and different variations have been preserved in Shaolin Temple. What we see from the performances of the masters both in Taoist and Buddhist lineages there is a lot common in Baduanjin. Chinese civilization and culture have had flexibility towards interaction, exchange and sharing knowledge, wisdom and arts between different traditions. This freedom of “knowledge flow” has enriched the civilization in thousands of years.

3. Eight Section Brocade's Importance

Baduanjin (八段錦) can be translated into English as Eight Section Brocade and it is a physical/therapeutic practice of Qigong. The historical records of Qi and meridian related health exercises were existing in very early times, in an ancient text called “The Internal Medicine of Emperor Huang” (黃帝內經). Generally Baduanjin has eight parts/sections which are called as Jin (錦, Brocade). This practice has continued “for generations, it has been taught and learned and passed down, for it is easy to learn with good effects” (Lee, 2005: 4-5). Besides Indian Yoga maybe it is among one of the most common traditional health exercises.

“Baduanjin” was mentioned in history during the Northern Song Dynasty. According to Hong Mai's Yi Jian Zhi, Li Shi-Ju (Emperor's Head Secretary) spent a long time as practicing some exercises inherited from Taoist monks: stretching hands and expanding body as imitating birds and bears. He was practicing the form called Eight Section Brocade. This text is a historical document on Baduanjin's existence and practice since the Song Dynasty for health benefits. There have been both sitting and standing variations of Baduanjin all during its history. When we look at to the ancient texts standing forms were “recorded in The Chapter of Wonders, Pivot of Dao (道樞·眾妙篇, Dao Shu, Zong Miao Pian, Song Dynasty)” and sitting forms mentioned “in The Ten Books of Daoist Practices (修真十書 Xiu Zhen Shi Shu, Ming Dynasty) or The Methods of Curing (活人心法, Huo Ren Xin Fa, Ming Dynasty)” (Lee, 2005: 5). As a living tradition Baduanjin has arrived until today.

A healthy life is much related to physical activity and flexibility. It is emphasized that an improvement in body's flexibility can contribute positively to “physical power” and “physical coordination ability”. Baduanjin exercise is beneficial in terms of physical flexibility and it “highlights the unification of physical movement and the

mind, with great attention paid to the connotation of physical exercise” (Li, 2014: 4). The choreography of form requires memorization and this is a positive contribution to memory. The smooth and soft movements are also very peaceful and resting for mind.

In 2000’s many important health sciences researches have been conducted on benefits of Baduanjin. Six studies (with 611 participants) reported between 2011-2015 have shown that Baduanjin Qigong exercise practice has contributed positively to the participants’ quality of life based on highly reliable assessment models such as WHOQOL⁵, EORTC-QLQ-C30⁶ besides several other ones (Zou, 2017: 9) (Image-6). There is a significant progress of Baduanjin practitioners compare to non-practicing individuals.

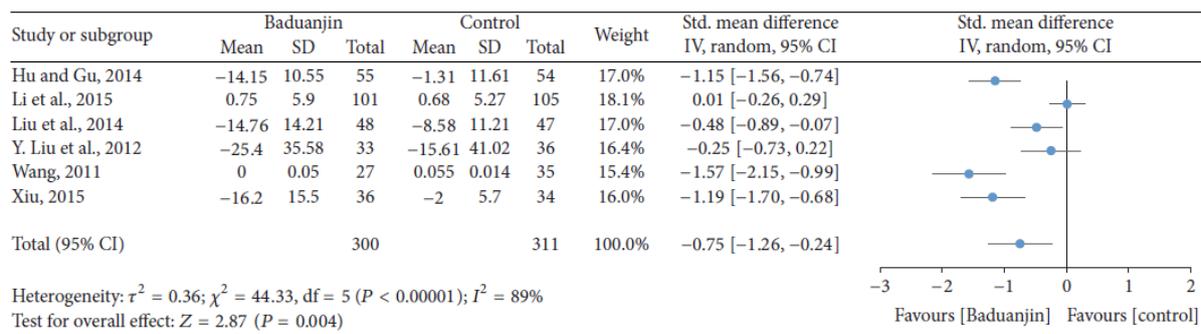


Image 6: The effect of Baduanjin practice on quality of life (Zou, 2017: 9)

Baduanjin Qigong, besides general life quality, also contribute positively to flexibility, physical power, performance, strength, physical balance, sleep quality, blood pressure and respiratory system (Zou, 2017: 9-12). In Turkey there is a visible interest for “acupuncture”. As it is well known, acupuncture is a practice of TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine). Since Baduanjin Qigong is also a part of TCM, we hope that our MD’s (medical doctors), physical therapists and all related professionals place more importance to this traditional exercise system which deserves for sure.

Cultural sociology has shown "the remarkable durability and continuity of a single culture structure over time that is able to reproduce itself discursively in various highly contingent contexts" (Alexander, 2003: 154). Cultural sociology, in its study of “culture structures” claims “social life is governed by a series of codes, which in essence are drivers of how people interpret and understand both aspects of their personal everyday life and the role of governments, media, firms and other organizations. These codes, learnt through growing up in a culture, are the frames for social action. In essence, they provide a type of working language for understanding social life” (Back, 2012: 38). Martial arts and traditional exercises are also components of “social life” with their own “codes” which are “the frames for social action” inherited through generations. Globalization process have created a suitable basis for spread of Qigong as a part of modern social life. The evolution and preservation of Baduanjin Qigong and its cultural codes need to be analyzed from interdisciplinary perspective.

4. Baduanjin Practice and Techniques

Forms, techniques and performance principles of Baduanjin Qigong may be varied according to lineage, tradition, region (in China or outside), school (Shaolin, Wudang or other ones), sifu (teacher) and many other factors. However, regardless which kind of Baduanjin you take there is something common still to call it and characterize as “Eight Section Brocade”. Max Weber defined ideal-type as “a sort of measuring stick that captures the most rational and most essential components of any social thing”⁷. Therefore, our illustrating Baduanjin here is like a way to capture “the most essential components” of this Qigong model, which is a socio-

⁵ WHOQOL (The World Health Organization Quality of Life), https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/whoqol/en (retrieved: 12.10.2018)

⁶ EORTC-QLQ-C30 (European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer, Quality of Life of Cancer Patients Questionnaire), <http://qol.eortc.org/questionnaire/eortc-qlq-c30> (retrieved: 12.10.2018)

⁷ See “Ideal-types”, <http://routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/ideal-types> (retrieved: 12.10.2018)

historical phenomenon, beyond a simple “social thing”, practiced and involved millions of people from ancient times to contemporary world. What is described and explained here may be perceived as the essence of Baduanjin, without rejecting other possible ways of practice.

Wu Ji: beginning posture

Baduanjin Qigong (8 Section Brocade), like Tai Chi Chuan and many other Chinese exercise systems, starts with Wu Ji (in simplified Chinese: 无极) posture. Literally it means “no pole” or “without any pole” which can be interpreted as emptiness and not being based or dependent on anything stable. It has a strong philosophical background in Taoism and it can be seen as a way of having no form, no pattern and hence no limitation.

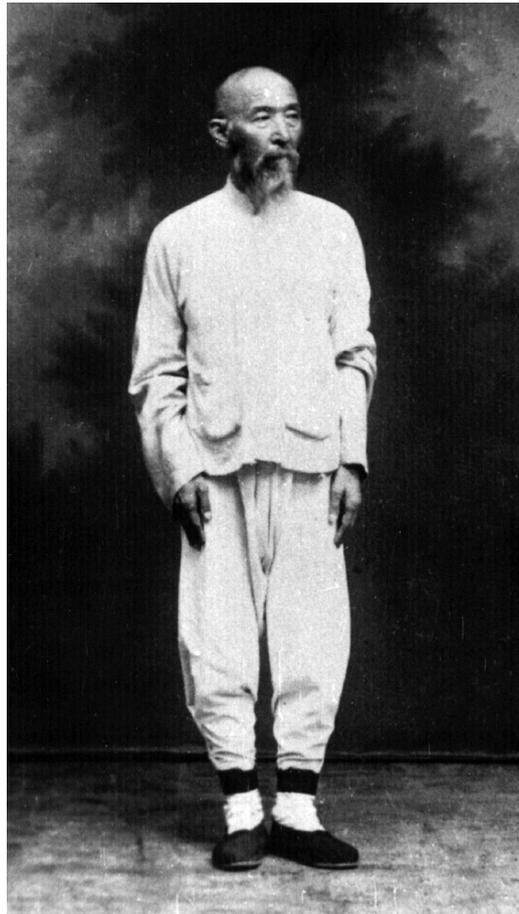


Image 7: Master Sun Lutang (1860-1933) in Wuji posture

When we look at to different Chinese internal arts we can see slight differences of how to perform this posture. However, the essence of Wuji may be considered almost the same in theoretical and philosophical levels: a stance / posture of emptiness, being ready to next movements and a meditative mindset focusing on dantian⁸. This posture should be conducted with straight body alignment, without bending in any direction. The feeling of being hung to the sky from baihui point (top of head) and grounded to the earth from bottoms of feet is important. Practitioner has to realize and visualize an energy flow between earth and sky via channeling his/her body. Legs should be slightly bent from knees which means not all weight concentrated on knees. A more elastic flow of body weight has to be maintained. In bottoms of feet weight not focused on heels. Body's weight has to be divided equally to both legs. Wu Ji can be a stance with shoulder width open feet. In any way of practicing Qigong shoulders have to be relaxed, hands relaxed in both sides in Wu Ji posture and breath normal and smooth. As my teacher Sifu Shi Dan Qiu said “relax does not mean collapse”. So, always feeling and remembering like hung from baihui point to up, towards sky is crucial. In Neigong focus has to be on dantian in general. Chin is tuck backward, teeth closed and tongue is pressed to roof of the mouth.

⁸ Where we mention here as dantian is also called “lower dantian” and energetic center of body in TCM.



Image 8: Dantian and energy flow⁹

Wu Ji can be also considered as a way of meditation and exercise itself. That means a practitioner can stay in Wu Ji posture, feel “qi” flow, meditate and relax as much as he/she can do. The important point on Chinese internal martial arts and exercise system is that it is not about speed and do many things in short, intensive times. The time, space and mode of Chinese internal arts are pretty different than Western style sports or exercises. Just standing, remaining still, doing nothing is already a challenging way of practice for these arts. Even there is another system, called Zhan Zhuang (站桩) which can be translated as “pile standing”, “tree standing” and only established as a model based on non-moving postures. From a typical Western mindset it would not look like an exercise at all. Zhan Zhuang is affiliated with Yiquan (意拳), another Chinese internal martial arts and we will focus on this topic in another article.



Image 9

⁹ <https://taiji-forum.de/qigong/stilles-qigong-jingong> (retrieved: 12.10.2018)

Pressing Up to the Heavens with Two Hands¹⁰

双手托天理三焦 (Two hands hold heavenly Sanjiao¹¹, triple warmer meridian)

This form can be also titled as “two hands hold up heavens”. From Wu Ji position (if heels touching) feet are to be separated from each other, with soft and flowing movement, shoulder width. Right foot can be stable and left one to move leftward in this movement. After this two hands are coming in front of dantian, as if holding an invisible energy ball. Palms are looking upward, left and right fingers are apart from each other around a fist (closed hand) distance. Then practitioner moves his/her palms upward slowly and smoothly. On chest level palms start to rotate inward 180 degree. Two hands continue to push towards sky. Arms and hands create a circular, symmetrical shape. When we arrive to top we should wait a short moment and then open hands to sides, go down slowly. This is completions of one time movement. Traditionally, in some schools it is done eight times. However, it depends on practitioner’s time and needs. It can be four, eight or any times required. Inhale and exhale are done smoothly, slowly. In different schools there are varied preferences. One of the possible principle can be when movement is closing, getting close to body, we can inhale; when it is opening, going towards outside of body we can exhale. Of course, by the time, when movements are practiced regularly a natural flow of breath would be settled. The same breathing method can be applied in all eight movements of Baduanjin.



Image 10

Drawing the Bow and Letting the Arrow Fly

左右开弓似射雕 (Drawing the bow towards left and right to shoot the eagle)

The order of movements can be various in Baduanjin depending on school, lineage and tradition or just preference of teacher. In our analysis the second movement is “drawing the bow to shoot the hawk”. We should also keep in mind that the technique of imitating to draw a bow and shoot a bird (hawk, eagle, Etc.) can be slightly different from each other in multiple schools. The way, Tao is not to be lost in doctrinal details. In this movement, generally in Baduanjin and all kinds of Qigong, Neigong, Etc. essence is more important than appearances and variations. This is better always remember. Practicing regularly is more important than to talk

¹⁰ English titles of each movement is taken from Master Michael P. Garofalo’s work on Baduanjin (<http://egreenway.com/taichichuan/esb.htm> , retrieved: 12.10.2018) Chinese characters of form can be found on Changchun University of Traditional Chinese Medicine’s website: <http://www.jlhtcm.com/index.php?m=article&a=index&cid=50&id=4346> (retrieved: 02.10.2018) Global Research Identifier Database page of the university: <https://www.grid.ac/institutes/grid.476918.5> (retrieved: 02.10.2018)

¹¹ See <http://lieske.com/channels/5e-sanjiao.htm> (retrieved: 02.10.2018)

details and separations. At the end of the day Qigong is a “physical” exercise and written or spoken words cannot take its place.

This movement is performed on the stance called Ma Bu (horse stance). This stance can be wide, narrow, high or low. Health conditions and abilities of individuals determine which is the best to perform. This movement can be done to left and right sides respectively, four times each side, total eight times. Performance is slow, relaxed and flowing again. Hands can be crossed on chest level, then arching arms like drawing a bow and visualize/imagine an arrow is going outward to the target. Face is turned to the direction arrow to go. Eyes look towards imaginary target. The mindset can be like negative qi (energy) is thrown out with sending arrow outward. Symbolism is a principle applicable to this section and other movements of Baduanjin. Although as a physical exercise it helps body in beneficial way, with this symbolism it may also provide psychological catharsis.



Image 11

Separating Heaven and Earth

调理脾胃须单举 (Regulating spleen and stomach with single hand lifting)

“Separating heaven and earth” is a movement of Baduanjin performed standing up, feet are shoulder width apart from each other. The feeling of connection between baihui (top of head) point and sky needs to be remembered here and all parts of Eight Section Brocade Qigong.

In this movement at the beginning hands are cupping on each other on dantian level, palms upward. Then, left hand and right hand are separated, left is going upward as if pushing to sky and right is going downward like slowly pressing toward ground. The visualization can be like separating a mass existing of energy emerged in front of us. Practitioner has to imagine that his/her palms are touching something and separating it. Also, it can be visualized that by this movement inner channels are cleansed and energy freed to flow better.

After left hand reaches to top the direction changes, left palm is going down and this time right palm is going up in the same manner. This movement continues until we reach four times each side. Our general breathing mechanism can be applied in this movement as well. All movements should be realized in a calm and slow way. Qigong is a practice which requires to keep “speed” out. Anybody interested in speed better practice either external Kung Fu or western sports such as tennis.



Image 12

The Wise Owl Looks Backward

五劳七伤往后瞧 (Looking backward to heal five wearies and seven injuries)

The fourth movement of Baduanjin Qigong can be named as “wise owl gazes backward”. This is also a movement to perform towards left and right, four times each side and eight total. As shown in photo, this movement is done on shoulder width open feet.

Animal imitation takes place in Baduanjin Qigong and other internal or external arts. Even there is a Qigong form, 5 Animal Qigong, which is merely based on imitation of animal movements. This is not really that much dominant in Baduanjin. Animal imitation is an important part of Chinese traditional Kung Fu, Neigong, Qigong, Etc. It can be found in Shaolin Kung Fu, Taoist martial arts and Qigong systems. Chinese people observed animals in ancient times, tried to find health benefits of physical exercises derived from their movements and possible fighting, self-defense techniques to be taken from different animals, even from insects, such as Praying Mantis.

“Wise owl gazes backward” requires closing body and opening towards sides with hands, meantime turn neck and head to the respective side like an owl. In this movement, not only head is turned, also eyes are rolled to see backward imitating an owl. As usual to all movements divided as left and right, this is practiced four times each side as well



Image 13

The Big Bear Turns from Side to Side

摇头摆尾去心火 (Shake head and sway tail to dispel heart fire)

“Big bear turns from side to side” is another imitative movement of Baduanjin Qigong. This movement begins on Ma Bu (horse stance). Then upper body makes a circular movement from right to left, when body arrives to far left, right leg is straight, left leg is bent and eyes looking to right foot direction. Both hands rest on thighs during this movement.

Breathing is without any rush, slow and natural. After one side is complete we do the same movement in the other direction. The important principle in this movement is that body has to turn in circular way from waist. Mostly upper body manages movement. Based on abilities and limitations of practitioner circular spin has to be as wide as possible. Feet are stable in this movement, keeping same distance between each other.



Image 14

Touching the Toes then Bending Backwards

两手攀足固肾腰 (Two hands climb from feet to up to solidify kidney and waist)

This is a stretching exercise which has several versions in different Qigong schools. The main idea is that first touching your toes, then your hands (right and left, palms inward) are going upward as sliding on calf, thighs and finally reach to waist. When you reach to your waist both hand can do a circular massage few times and then to bend backward.

One of the nubs of practicing this movement is that legs and knees must be straight, stretched while you try to reach toes. If you cannot reach toes with stretched knees, then you needs to go downward as much as you can. Bending knees to be able to reach toes is among common mistakes of this technique. In traditional Chinese martial arts and exercise systems there is no room to unhealthy strain of your body, creating harms and injuries. As much as you can do is perfectly suitable to the spirit of Qigong. This movement can be practiced eight times.

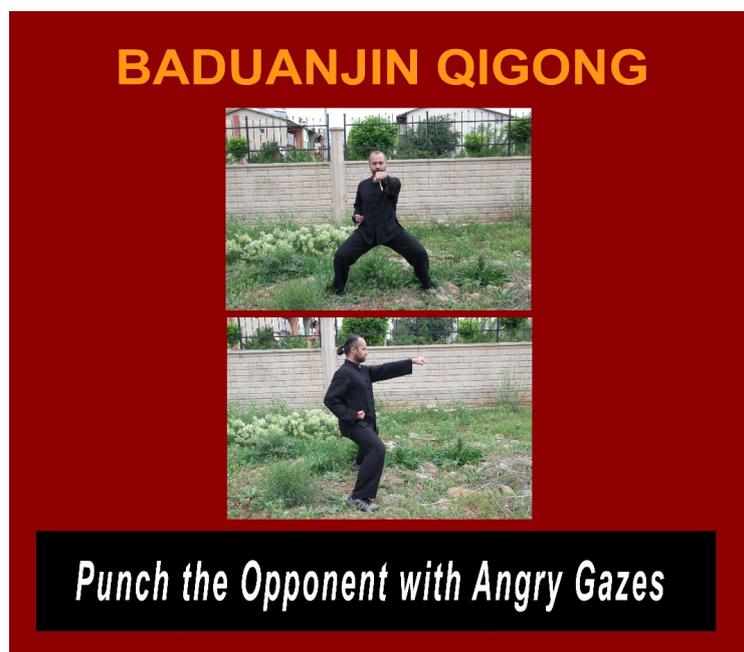


Image 15

Punching with an Angry Gaze

攒拳怒目增气力 (Punching with angry eyes to increase strength)

Qigong and in this research Baduanjin should be understood and analyzed as health preservation systems. Although sometimes, some particular techniques or stances may resemble martial arts, or practitioners of Qigong are usually practicing Chinese martial arts as well (Xingyiquan, Taijiquan, Liuhebafa or external arts) at the same time, we should clearly admit and express that Qigong is not a martial system at all. Therefore, we should consider and comprehend Qigong techniques profoundly with their proper inner meanings.

This movement is done on horse stance. Although physically it looks like we are hitting out eight punches (divided as left and right) actually these are ways for energy cultivation, concentration and direction. Focus is on dantian, once one punch is going outward the other one is catching a small energy ball with a circular, spinning motion and goes back to dantian. Movement is continuous, flowing and without any tension. There is neither hitter nor a hit one, just we can talk about the dance of energy visualized. Baihui point's connection with sky, feeling of being pulled upward are crucial again.

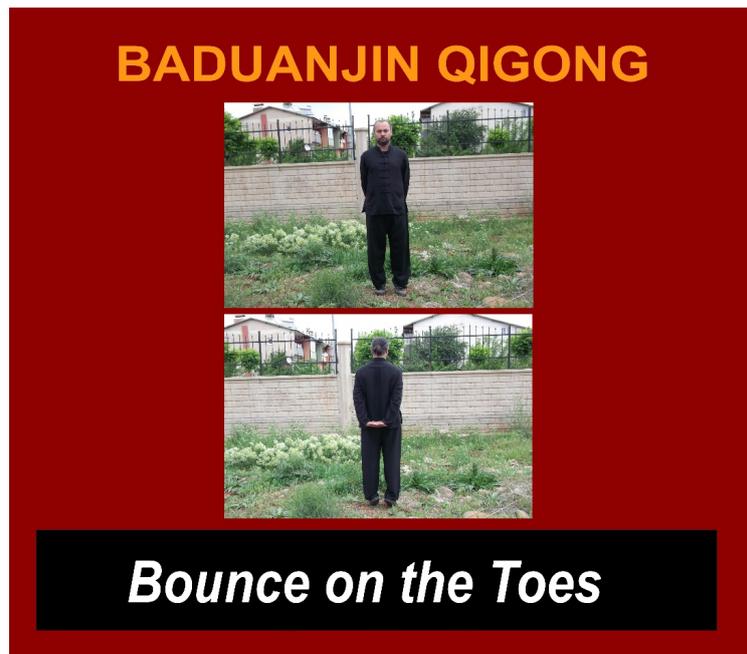


Image 16

Shaking the Body

背后七颠百病消 (Shake the body to leave a hundred diseases back)

The final technique of Baduanjin is “bounce on the toes” which is practiced as rising on toes and then drop body on heels to ground eight times. Fingers of both hands are clamped together on back of waist. When body is rising upward palms are pressing down. In the moment of dropping body weight downward practitioner has to visualize that his/her all negative qi is dropped as well. Negativity is going, he/she is becoming more peaceful, harmonized and attuned with energy of the universe. Body is stretched upward and then left down. In moment of “drop” it should be practiced not as a way of “collapse”. Even when body is left down still it should be vigorous. It is a very dynamic exercise preparing practitioner to close Baduanjin Qigong.

Closing

After completing Baduanjin, Eight Section Brocade Qigong, we come to Wu Ji position again. It is equally beginning and ending. Emptiness and readiness. Appearance and disappearance. Where there is no pole, circular, moving and harmonizing. On Wu Ji stance slowly we open our hands both sides upward as if catching a big energy ball staying in front of us. We cover the visualized, imaginary ball elliptically and then both hands are going downward, toward dantian. When hands reach dantian they can stay there for a while. Alternatively, after reaching dantian we can go to Wu Ji position again and finish Qigong practice. On Wu Ji it is possible to stay for some time in meditative mood. Wu Ji is used as standing meditation in Neigong. This is the closing of Baduanjin Qigong.

5. Conclusion

Qigong is as traditional Chinese exercise system which has been practiced for thousands of years. Baduanjin is among the most common forms of Qigong. Baduanjin (Eight Section Brocade) takes place both in Taoist and Buddhist cultural environments of China.

We have discussed that Baduanjin, its cultural codes and practice have spread internationally with the process of globalization. Researches in health studies have shown the importance and positive contributions of Eight Section Brocade to individuals. As a complimentary physical therapy it is highly recommended for several health benefits.

In this research, besides the social and cultural aspects of Baduanjin Qigong a comprehensive instructional model is given as well. Chinese arts, especially the internal ones (Neigong) are very keen and open to slight modifications based on needs, abilities and skills of practitioner. These are not strict exercise systems to perform without considering what really an individual can do. Of course there is a traditional heritage, always better to keep it original and not decayed. However, without giving a negative effect on this inheritance, optimum changes in practice for maximum positive contribution to people's health is possible, when these are committed properly by specialists.

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