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A Woman's Qigong Guide

Empowerment through Movement,
Diet, and Herbs



by yanling l. johnson

Y M A A P U B L I C A T I O N C E N T E R

Boston, Mass. USA

YMAA PUBLICATION CENTER
Main Office: 4354 Washington Street
Boston, Massachusetts, 02131
617-323-7215; ymaa@aol.com
www.ymaa.com

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Cover design by Richard Rossiter
Text design by Katya Popova

ISBN: 1-886969-83-3

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Publisher's Cataloging in Publication
(Prepared by *Quality Books Inc.*)

Johnson, Yanling L.

A woman's qigong guide : empowerment through
movement, diet, and herbs / by Yanling L. Johnson. —
1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

LCCN: 00-109784

ISBN: 1-886969-83-3

1. Qi gong. 2. Women—Health and hygiene.
I. Title.

RA781.8.J64 2001

613.7148'082
QB101-200148

Qigong for Women

by yanling l. johnson

Health care is public education.

Share my qigong journey and experience.

A book that helps to reveal your own power, to stay healthy and beautiful.

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physician before engaging in them.

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Foreword

(Translation of 99-year-old
Taoist, Zhen Yangzi of the White
Cloud Monastery, writing for
Yanling Johnson)

AUGUST 18, 1999

“Study abstruse Taoism and its philosophy, practice until
attaining Tao and immortalized.”

—99-year-old Taoist of the
White Cloud Monastery, Zheng Yangzi

Zheng Yangzi is a well-known Taoist who has written several
valuable books on qigong and the history of Taoist philosophy.
December 14, 1999

The earliest saying of qigong was used by the Yellow Emperor,
who consulted his teachers Chi Songzi and Guang Chenzi about
Tao and qigong practice. *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* is
the first Chinese medical book, which includes a large quantity of
qigong practice. The Chinese traditional way for preserving
health, anti-aging and healing illnesses has become a rich, pro-
found field. Many high level qigong masters were sages who left
us a treasure house of health care. Yanling is helping to share this
treasure with the rest of the world.

Li Yu-lin,
Vice Chief Supervisor of the
White Cloud Taoist Monastery

Preface

I wanted to write this book because I feel that it is time to pass on the ancient knowledge of Chinese qigong and philosophy to women of all walks of life. Through the years women have been oppressed by society, and although we have overcome many obstacles, most of us continue to battle for equality.

I remember my mother telling me many years ago that in Shanghai in the 1930s there was a show involving a prostitute who was forced to have sex with a dog. She told me that my father's older cousins took him there. He told her of how terrible it was and how the girl's face was pale and sallow; he never went again. I remember the sadness and slight rage I felt for the girl being so inhumanely treated. I remember meeting women in China who were powerless. These women cared for their extended families and children, only to find themselves divorced and left behind struggling. Their husbands however, went on to hold high government positions.

When I came to the United States, I thought that American men and women enjoyed equal rights and women had the right to make their own choices. Yet, in America, I have met women who feel unfulfilled and are searching more or are continually seeking to improve themselves. I also have met women who have lost their souls in a confused search for freedom. Soon I realized that although American women have struggled long and hard for their freedom and now have more rights than the women do in China, still many American women are abused physically, verbally, and mentally. I understand women from different cultures and different societies still suffer the same conflicts. So, when someone asked me to write a qigong book for women, it seemed apparent that it was, indeed, time to embark on such a task.

I am writing this book with the intent to share with anyone interested, the ancient Chinese wisdom concerning the practice of qigong and cultivation. I have included some of my own expe-

riences with the hope that they will help provide the tools for you to gain self-confidence and to establish balance in your life.

I dedicate this book to the female immortals, to the qigong masters in China, to all my teachers, and to the women of the world.

Much thanks to David Ripianzi who shared my vision for this book and also gave me helpful suggestions and great appreciation to my lovely editor Sharon Rose who worked very hard and put up with my “Chinglish” and stubbornness. Thanks to Dr. Yang and the people of YMAA who have delivered my book to the public.



Chapter 1

The History of Qigong and My Story

Laying a solid foundation is a fundamental part of constructing a building. In this case, the foundation of your new building will be the integration of new habits and ideas that will lead you to a better way of life. This chapter and those that follow will impart to you knowledge that is vital to the successful practice of qigong and cultivation and that will help you to reap the benefits of such internal exercises. It is my wish to share with you the knowledge that has allowed me to live a life that is emotionally and physically balanced.

If you have a basic understanding of the Chinese culture, medicine, and philosophy it will be easier to understand qigong because qigong is rooted in such practices. With that in mind, let us begin our qigong journey with a brief history of qigong.

history of qigong

The term, qigong, was first used by Taoist Immortal Xu Zhi-yang (A.D. 239–374). There are three main types of qigong in China: Taoist (Daoist), Buddhist, and Confucian. When talking about qigong, Chinese religions often come up because the Chinese monks and Taoists also practice qigong and cultivate as part of their religious practice. However, practicing qigong does not necessarily mean that you are practicing or taking part in that particular religion. It is just that these religions also contain qigong practice. After you read the history, you will understand why.

Taoist qigong originates from Taoism and started approximately 7,000 years ago. Taoism originally was and still is a philosophy; however, a nationalized religion based on this philosophy was recognized about 1,900 years ago. The earliest forms of Taoism, were started by the first six Chinese emperors during the remote period. These individuals taught people how to exercise qi within the body and to adapt to nature. Each were educated and trained by great qigong teachers such as the sage, Peng zu, who was the teacher of the Yellow Emperor. Peng zu was said to have lived for over 1,000 years, while the Yellow Emperor himself lived for over 100 years (Taoism teaches that through qigong practice, human beings can live for a very long time, giving rise to such legends as the life span of Peng zu).

The Taoist philosophy considers the human body to be a small qi field; and nature, including the earth and universe, a large qi field. Thus, balancing qi and compromising with nature to keep healthy and live a long life, such are the main theories that were handed down by those sages.

The first Emperor of China, Shen Nong, taught people how to use herbs to balance qi within their bodies as well as with nature. It is said he was able to scan the qi channels inside the body (I personally know qigong masters that can do this). The original *Herbal Classic*, (*Shen Nong Ben Cao*), was named after him. Even today, the *Herbal Classic* is still one of the most important textbooks for students of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

The second Emperor, Fu Xi, taught people how to eat foods and to understand spatial relationships of people and places in order to harmonize qi. Feng shui, the theory of how to balance qi in the environment, originated from his theory of *Ba gua*. Based on the *Ba gua* theory, *Ba gua* qigong practice, and martial arts (e.g., *Ba Gua Palm* and *Ba Gua Sword*) were later created by Taoists.

The fifth Emperor, the Yellow Emperor, taught people to practice qigong and medicine to balance qi. The first medical book, The Yellow Emperor's *Nei Jing* was named in his honor. In this medical book, two-thirds of the content relates to qigong; the remaining text concerns herbs, diet, and diagnosing illness.

Additionally, there are other Taoist texts that were not written by or named in honor of emperors. Two of the most well known are the *I Ching* and the *Tao Te Ching* (*Dao De Jing*). The *Tao Te Ching* is one of the most translated books in history. It was written by Lao Zi

who was a great philosopher and qigong master. This book through the centuries has had a powerful influence in qigong and Chinese philosophy. The *I Ching* was written at least 3,700 years ago. The *I Ching* says, “The earth, the universe and human beings are the three in one, the three form one organic whole.” In other words, human beings depend on natural resources and compromise with the natural world in order to survive. The *I Ching* is considered the fountainhead of Chinese culture, medicine, and qigong practice. The integration of the *I Ching* with qigong and traditional medical practices gives rise to metaphors such as, “Like the blended water and milk, *I Ching* and medicine are inseparable.”

Through the centuries, qigong has developed into many different styles. All of these different styles, however, incorporate the use of herbs and dietary practices because, within the Taoist philosophy, herbs and nutrition are considered to be inseparable from qigong practice for preserving health and prolonging lives. Thus, all Taoists are educated in qigong, herbal medicine, and dietary practices. Many have become experts, achieving mastery through a comprehensive study of the *I Ching*. Following are some of the most famous.

- ❖ Bian Que, an outstanding physician and a great qigong master (770–476 B.C.), could detect a disease at a very early stage before any symptom was visible. He did this by looking at the facial qi-color of his patients. He taught people to use qigong, foods, and medicine to prevent and relieve pathogenic factors and cleanse the organs. His form, Imitating the Birds and Animals, is still popular today.
- ❖ Tao Hong-jin (A.D. 452–536) updated the *Herbal Classic* and doubled it in size.
- ❖ Chen Zang-qi and the King of Medicine, Sun Si-miao, (who both lived during the Tang Dynasty) did additional work updating the *Herbal Classic*.

Over time, other Taoist branches developed their own style that gained popularity during different dynasties. One such branch is the well-known Holistic Zhen Taoist branch (A.D. 960–1279). Its founder was the great master of martial arts and qigong, Immortal Wang Chong-yang. He fostered seven students all whom attained Tao and who later became known as the Seven Immortals. Among the seven were Qiu Chu-ji, Ma Dan-yang, Tan Chu-ru, and female Immortal Sun, Bu-Er.

Qiu Chu-ji, the youngest of the Seven Immortals, established the Dragon Gate Taoist branch that was popular during the Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 1271–1368).

During the Ming Dynasty, the Immortal Zhang San-feng established the Taoist School of taiji and taiji practice became popular. Today, the number of the Taoist religious monasteries that were established based on the philosophy of Taoism still remains small compared with that of the other religions.

During the time that Taoist qigong was popular, Confucian qigong was just beginning to develop. At the age of fifty, Confucius created his style of qigong after he studied the *I Ching*. Confucian qigong has been handed down for generations.

A very important physician and qigong master and Confucian scholar, Li Shi-zhen (1518–1593), spent all his life experimenting and updating the *Herbal Classic* (*Ben Cao*).

Nineteen hundred years ago, Buddhism integrated into the Chinese culture and became deeply entwined with Taoism. Buddhist qigong includes various practices (e.g., Big Cart and the Small Cart) and branches (e.g., Tibetan, Chan). Such qigong practice is recognized in this quote from Lord Buddha: “If one only limits self in practicing the Small Cart without merging the Big Cart practice, it will be like burned seeds or spoiled sprouts.”

The Buddhist *chan* practice, (*zen* in Japanese) was brought to China in the year of A.D. 527 by the 28th successor of the Lord Buddha, Damo. He taught chan practice at the Shaolin Temple in Henan Province where self-defense type of martial arts had been passed down since about A.D. 500.

Throughout history, the philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism began to integrate as they all shared a commonality: the idea of individual effort in compromising and harmonizing with nature. Because of this commonality, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian qigong were able to co-exist and yet retain their individual identities.

I have read ancient qigong books written by Taoists who also included Buddhist qigong practices and vice versa. Chinese classic literature often contains stories of martial arts masters (Taoist qigong masters and Buddhist monk qigong masters alike) who were traveling together and teaching each other. A well-known Buddhist qigong master who was also a Confucian scholar, Fu Jushi (A.D. 420–589), wore a Taoist cap, a monk's coat and a pair

of Confucian scholar shoes to show people the integration of the different schools of thought and the many types of qigong.

Great masters made few distinctions between philosophical schools of thought, religions, or kinds of qigong practiced. When such masters attained a high level of understanding, it was realized that there were no differences. Think of it as building many different roads to the same city.

Such integration of knowledge and practice has made it possible for qigong to integrate with health and general healing and develop into a systematic, comprehensive, and profound field. According to the research of Dr. Liu Tian-jun, there are about 2,700 types of qigong today; 80% Taoist, 10% Buddhist, the remainder are Confucian and folk styles.

The practice of qigong has endured much through the centuries. Some masters tried to develop qigong practice into religions; others—such as politicians like Mao Zedong—oppressed qigong for personal gain. Yet qigong always stays true to its origin and always perseveres. Qigong has been full of vitality for at least 5,000 years and has never been controlled by an individual—and it never will be.

Qigong has been a Chinese treasure for thousands of years to both men and women alike. Even Emperor Qin Shi Huang (221–207 B.C.) would not burn any medical, qigong, or diet books even when he ordered all the books that he could find be burned (and more than 200 well-known scholars to be buried alive). Qigong has been kept alive in the Chinese culture through word of mouth and through the books written by masters from ancient times to present day. Such books have been preserved for centuries by individuals, emperors, and kings, as well as in the temples. Until recently, much of this treasure has been kept from the rest of the world primarily because of language differences and politics: the Chinese language is not easily translated into other languages, and, until recently, political tensions have made such texts difficult to obtain. (Recently, political relations have eased up enough to allow ancient texts to be more accessible to those that can translate them.) At last, it is possible for eastern ideas and philosophies to be brought to the people of the west.

You will see in the following chapters that qigong practice closely entwines itself with dietary practice and herbal medicine. Because qigong is a self-effort to balance and conform oneself to

nature, the practice is always based on the individual practitioners needs, will, and consciousness. Thus, qigong becomes a form of self-education not only in its practice, but in eating habits and herbal formulas as well. I like to think of it as a three-in-one healthcare system.

eastern healthcare practices

Having lived in the United States for fifteen years, I have had the opportunity to become familiar with western healthcare, and I have noticed considerable differences between eastern and western healthcare systems. In order to help you better understand qigong, let us look at how qigong healthcare compares to western healthcare.

1. The primary focus of western healthcare is to take care of an individual after he or she has become ill. In the Chinese culture, prevention of illness is more actively stressed as the first priority. Qigong plays an important role in this prevention strategy. The philosophy of preventive healthcare was evident in the Chinese culture 5,000 years ago. An ancient teaching by the Yellow Emperor states, "To eat and exercise to prevent is more important than to heal. A good physician will treat an illness before it happens."

Building up such inner strength is the root of qigong practice.

2. In the west, building muscle mass through resistance training and intense physical exercise is a popular way to keep fit. According to Chinese health theory, too much exercise can be just as harmful as too little exercise. Therefore, building the outer structure in excess does little for inner cultivation. Only the appropriate amount of physical exercise will yield the most benefit; thus, proper balance must be found. Qigong exercise *cannot* only take care of inner healing, it can take care of the physical body as well.
3. The Chinese mainly seek healthcare through natural sources. I do not find much of this practice in western medicine. I have observed that western medicine depends a lot on modern technology and synthetic chemicals.
4. Western medicine treats eating disorders, anxiety, obesity, hypertension, etc. as diseases. To Chinese medicine these are only symptoms and not the cause or root of the problem. According to the Yellow Emperor's *Nei Jing*, disease is described as follows: "When a symptom shows, the illness inside the body has been there for a long time."

5. In Chinese medical theory, the qi channels that exist in the body can decide a person's health condition, life, or death. In order to experience optimum health, these channels must exist in an unblocked state or illness will occur. It is also believed that emotions are a major cause of most illnesses because they affect the circulation of qi. For example, when cancer is being treated with traditional Chinese medicine, the doctor will focus on both removing the blood stagnation in the patient by promoting qi circulation and treating the patient's emotional state.

Thus, you can see why from the Chinese perspective, in order to get to the root of a problem it is necessary for the integration of qigong practice, herbal medicine, and diet. This integration works on strengthening the qi within our bodies. Learning to integrate these three sciences is known as *cultivation*.

This book will take you on a journey of understanding cultivation. This journey will teach you qigong practices that have been designed to especially benefit women. At the same time, you will journey into the realm of fundamental Chinese philosophies and the principles of traditional Chinese herbal medicine and dietary practices. Since all of these disciplines are entwined, you will get a good idea of the qigong way so that you can add balance and harmony to your life.

why qigong for women?

Women are built differently from men, both physically and mentally, so it makes sense that there are qigong practices specific for each sex. Specific rules concerning qigong practice that differ from men are highlighted throughout the text. Certainly Chinese philosophies and medicine apply to both men and women, and, of course, both men and women practice qigong, but qigong addresses the differences as well as the similarities. In the *I Ching*, men and women share importance and are compared to “the heaven and the earth”; yet the *I Ching* also shows their differences and compares such differences to “water and fire.” Unfortunately, China was and still is a male-dominated society, so most of the time the ancient texts that were written focused on the needs of males. Because there are not many qigong books for women, it is from my heart that I wish to share these treasures with you. I would like to remind women of all cultures to be aware of their inner power and to know the potential that they possess but have

not yet explored. The exercises found in this book can teach you to absorb energy from the universe in order to prevent illness, create a healthier physical and emotional life, and promote spiritual growth. I sincerely believe that qigong practice helps put you in touch with yourself—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

In many cultures, women are often linked to flowers, and I think it is good to be identified with such beauty. If your goal is to preserve health and beauty, learn the theory behind qigong, practice persistently, and your goal will be achieved. Qigong practice can bring out your most valuable qualities. Qigong can help you become your own person in touch with the universe. The first step toward this goal is to study the theory. Such study will prepare your mind and body. Once you are ready, the next step is to bring out your own being.

Within this text I have translated and include in this text a few partial Chinese poems written by various ancient sages. The one you are about to read is about happiness, a state that I feel we all desire on one level or another and a state that, with the proper cultivation, will be more attainable to you. I hope that you enjoy the poems. When you read them you can replace *he* with *she*. The best way to understand them is to read them repeatedly and reflect on their meanings.

He or she who knows how to be happy avoids trouble instead of stirring up trouble.

He who knows how to be happy turns big problems into small ones.

He who knows how to be a happy person turns small trouble into none.

Avoid talking too much after drinking,

Avoid getting upset when eating,

Learn to tolerate the things that are very difficult to tolerate,

And do not argue with an unreasonable person.

One gets sick only when they eat without control,

And when they constantly worry, death is waiting for them.

Tolerance is the treasure of the xin (heart-mind),

Intolerance is the root of trouble.

The tongue stays long in the mouth because of its softness;

The tooth is broken because of its hardness.

Think of the tolerance as a recipe for happiness.

Those who cannot be tolerant for one minute

Will only live a long, miserable life.

Money is the root of trouble,

To make money is only for building up a business.

*Money is the root of anxiety,
 Which can also cause all kinds of trouble.
 If one does not love money,
 That will be the start of attaining Tao.
 One who pursues Tao forgets the shape of their body;
 One who cares about health does not indulge in gains,
 One who has attained Tao forgets their xin (mind/heart).
 I enjoy living carefree although being poor;
 And climbing up the mountains to see the scenery, and resting under
 the big tree,
 I bathe in the springs, and I collect the food fresh.
 I enjoy the delicious food from the mountains,
 And the delicious fish from the stream.
 I get up whenever I like, which is my leisure.
 I do not seek fame; that only lasts temporarily,
 And rather not leave praise or blame when I am gone.
 Who would like to have worries later,
 Although he seems now enjoying the gay?*

– Han Tui-zhi

the buddha within

There is a Chinese saying, “Everyone is born a Buddha.” Essentially, this means that we are all born with emotional, physical, and spiritual clarity. Unfortunately life’s hardships and corruption can bury the Buddha deep inside us. Yet, through qigong practice and cultivation, your Buddha can be released. In other words, qigong practice can put you back in touch with your inner self.

Some time ago, I was watching a television special on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This program brought to my attention one of his teachings that he shared with his disciples. He told them, “If you want to know who I am, you must first know yourself.” To me, this great sage was saying the same thing as finding the inner Buddha or the real being inside. Many such ideas can be found in the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism as well.

Imagine feeling in control of yourself and at peace! As you learn and practice qigong, you will become aware of and be able to experience some of your own internal power. The more you practice, the more aware of your internal power you will become. By using your own internal power, you will become healthier, feel alive and vital, and—frankly—look younger naturally. (Most qigong practitioners look and feel younger than before they practiced qigong. I have nev-

er spent money on expensive lotions. I look younger because of my qigong practice). This book is designed to start you at the beginning and lead you through a journey of knowledge and self-actualization. If you work at it, you really can awaken the Buddha within you.

Educating yourself, believing in yourself, and allowing yourself to use your own wisdom to make decisions is to understand the true spirit of qigong. It is my intent that you will learn how to teach yourself to listen to and trust your instincts. Arm yourself with knowledge because with knowledge comes self-control and confidence. For example, after reading this book, you may seek out a teacher and good books to help you on your journey. When you have a good foundation of knowledge, you will be able to recognize unqualified teachers. I have seen some qigong teachers or healers that do not know much about qigong theory at all. Many have not practiced enough to gain the ability and experience to teach or treat you. You need to be sure that what someone is trying to teach you, is, in fact, the real thing and not something that they know little about. Great qigong masters carry the sentiment, "To give the readers wrong information would be worse than murdering." My point is that to believe blindly and only depend on the help of another is not real qigong practice. You must strive to educate yourself and practice persistently.

I hope my story and this book can help you understand what qigong really is and why cultivation is crucial to qigong practice so that you can begin your qigong journey headed in the right direction.

my story

My story will show you how I have been working on my emotions and how I learned to deal with my problems and face the real world by studying the teachings and wisdom of many classic books—including many about qigong. Frankly, I was not aware that it was qigong theory; these principles within Taoism guided me in my young life and helped me to find compromise, balance, and harmony in my life. I have always followed these principles. There have been times in my life—and I am sure there will be more times to come—that my qigong practice and cultivation has helped me grow to the next level of my existence.

Please allow me to share with you briefly some of my life so that perhaps it can in some way be helpful in your life. Although I have suffered many setbacks and disappointments in my life thus far (and who has not?), I have been able to remove bitterness and anger from

my heart and replace it with forgiveness. I simply learned to turn my attention to the future. My qigong practice and cultivation has done this for me, and this is why I share this gift with you.

I was born in Beijing, China, the third daughter of a judge and general of the pre-nationalists, as they were called. It was the nationalist government that was overthrown by Chairman Mao Zedong's communist government. Many nationalists fled to Taiwan. Some, like my father, stayed because Mao's government promised him that he could keep his job if he helped them. But eight months later he was put in prison without a trial after the communists no longer needed his help.

As a child I had many varied ambitions as I grew up. I had many opportunities to watch martial arts and qigong performances and so, as a young child, I wanted to be a martial arts master to save the poor and punish evil. When I entered the third grade, I became interested in being a writer, and before graduating from junior high, I wanted to be a vocal soloist. I experienced many activities like singing in the choir for high school girls and playing on the district basketball team.

All in all, I was a typical child with many ambitions and dreams—but at that time in China, it was politics and government that decided your fate. The government did not trust the families of former nationalists and watched us very closely. Many of us did not know that we were distrusted. We were told that as long as we loved the communist party and worked hard, we would all be treated as equals. This is what I believed.

When I graduated from junior high school, I could not go to the music school because the school was closed during the three famine years. I chose instead to go a boarding high school, the Beijing Foreign Languages High School. I chose English as my major and had dreams of being a journalist or a radio host to foreign countries. I enjoyed being chosen to be the lead roles in the foreign language festivals each year and was the school radio broadcaster for a half year; yet later I was dismissed because I was the daughter of a former nationalist.

My family's former political background removed me from ever fitting into any popular girls' groups during my seventeen years in school. Young students my own age were taught that all children of former nationalists were influenced by their parents and should be watched and reeducated. No one wanted trouble, so the other students shunned me. I learned not to fit in from a young age. The

many classic books that I read taught me not to care much about popularity. I occupied myself with books and other activities, and I had teachers that cared about me and helped to guide me. I considered myself “a crane standing among chickens,” i.e., standing head and shoulders above others, and I was proud of my achievements. I took any unfair political treatment to me, as a personal test and I believed that good would indeed be rewarded.

The government and school authorities taught children like me that their families were criminals of the government. They said that all rich people like my father had the blood of innocent people on their hands and in order to make amends for what he had done I had to become a different person than my father. So, I brainwashed myself by reading Mao’s boring books and followed his teachings: “Serve the people and the Party with one heart. Be honest and loyal to the Party.” I believed in Mao’s book (“The Little Red Book”); I believed that the Party and Chairman Mao did not mean to treat people unfairly, and I was optimistic and hopeful about my future. I wanted to go to the college of my dreams.

I graduated from high school as planned. Yet, even though I did quite well in the entrance examination, the government sent me to an ordinary college because of my father’s politics. Students that had much lower grades but that were politically qualified were sent to the best universities. My former classmates told me in later years that there were files kept on rich families and the families of former nationalists that were stamped, “Only allowed to go to an ordinary college.”

I was angry and quite disappointed. After some time, I put to use what I had learned and calmed down. I put aside negativity and looked for the fortunate side of the situation. It was extremely difficult for students who were from families like mine to get any chance at all to attend college and, although it was not my ideal choice, it was a chance to attend college nonetheless.

I still studied hard and was a good student, but I no longer had career dreams. I became increasingly more silent. I sang often to soothe my depression. I joined the ice skating team, skating in endless circles to forget the real world. Most of my spare time was spent in the library. Reading was not just a hobby; it was a way to escape and forget. Early in the summer of 1966, terror suddenly enveloped Beijing; the Cultural Revolution began and changed the lives of millions of Chinese people. This happened because of Mao’s failed economic policies, causing his supporters among his colleagues to lose faith in

him. Knowing this Mao staged a mass political movement that became known as the Cultural Revolution. Mao called on young high school students to start this movement so that he could dispose of those that disagreed with his ideas. He directed these students to establish Red Guard organizations that replaced those government authorities that did not carry out his policies. This movement spread like wildfire in high schools and junior high schools and then into colleges and elementary schools. The Red Guards were encouraged to travel throughout the country to promote this movement. They punished anyone that they thought was not loyal to Chairman Mao. Former landowners, former nationalist officials and officers, former capitalists, anyone who opposed any of Mao's policies was whipped, beaten, jailed, or killed. Over twenty million people lost their lives.

Most young people participated non-violently in this movement, in fact, but took advantage of the situation to travel. I, too, wanted to travel, but I dared not go alone because of my family situation; I joined a team led by a Red Guard member that believed in non-violence. He was leading a long march to go to the early revolution base in Yanan County. On foot, I walked for over a month with my teammates to get there. We stayed in Yanan County for a week before taking a train to the south of China. It was during this trip that I saw the poverty in most of the countryside and realized that politics and hunger for power was covered by beautiful promises. My last bit of hope for the communists and Mao was torn to pieces. For the first time in my life, I opened my eyes to what politics had done to my country and my life. Just before we traveled to the south, my team was called back to Beijing. About eight months later, all of Mao's enemies had been removed and the young students were no longer needed. Mao's trusted PLA took over the schools and the students, including the all the Red Guards, were called on to begin their studies. Four years later, I graduated from college and became a high school teacher, living a quiet life so as not to draw government attention to me. Still, I kept the teachings from the classic books in my mind. They reminded me to live with integrity and decency. I was no longer interested in politics.

I married a young engineer and after a year and a half, our lovely, bright little girl added colors to my pale life. I offered the best education to my little daughter and hoped that she would have a chance to fulfill her dreams. Unfortunately, I married an unfaithful husband who would not stop cheating. I stayed with him

because, despite his infidelities, he was a loving father that I did not want to take him away from my child. We had a second child together—my loving son—but still the cheating continued. Divorce was not easy in China, so I stayed in that marriage for fourteen years. I buried my own dreams deeply in my heart and lived mainly for my children and their education. I managed to fit daily qigong practice into my life, and I honestly believe it was qigong that helped me maintain a balanced emotional state during such difficult times. As you can see, my cultivation taught me to forget and tolerate. Being able to do so is a positive power that can induce the *yang qi*—the energy that is light and that benefits health. This was the reason that I did not often feel a heavy heart and avoided falling into the hole of depression.

When China finally opened its door to the west, a small number of scholars were given the opportunity to come to the United States. In 1985, I came to graduate school in Oregon. In the end, I did finally get a divorce.

When I arrived in America, feeling free was an unspeakable joy. Being able to move about freely without a permit from the police station was a freedom that I had never enjoyed. Very soon, I learned to speak freely and without my habitual caution. However, I did not let this freedom overwhelm me. My past experiences and the balance that qigong added to my life gave me the power to keep my mind clear and focused. I let go of my ex-husband, but I still was concerned for the children I had left in the care of their father in China. My heart was like the mother's heart in the following 1,700-year-old poem:

*The loving mother is stitching,
Holding a needle with thread.
Stitching, stitching, she sews, and the thread is extending,
As if it were connecting the coat
On her son who is travelling,
A thousand miles away.
No matter how far he travels,
His mother's caring thoughts
Are like the thread in the needle
Extending, extending in her hand and,
So she sews, and sews
For him day after day
As if the thread is connecting
Herself with her son
On his journey to accompany him.*

I was trying to find a new life for my children and myself. During this time of change, my qigong practice helped ease my concerns, gave me comfort and stability, and taught me more of the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness.

As I started to interact with the women in this country, I began to see what my culture had given me; my cultivation and qigong practice had empowered me. I discovered that many American women were trapped in lives of emotional imbalance. Some had marriage problems or suffered physical and mental abuses from their spouses; others were divorced and raising small children as single parents. Many had problems with their own parents, families, and in-laws. Others had become confused about life and had difficulty dealing with reality, especially trying to exist in a highly competitive and materialistic society. Having to live with such situations every day, it is easy for us to lose a connection to ourselves. If you exist in a state of emotional imbalance caused by social trappings or undue stress, you then open the door for physical ailments to follow.

women in chinese qigong history

Although my culture is different, we still have a common bond: we are women. Just like American women, Chinese women have struggled through oppression and are now taking new roles in society—roles other than that of wife and mother. Chinese culture has taught them to be humble and hardworking professionals in a wide variety of fields, including education, science, and medicine to name a few. Many Chinese women practice qigong and have become masters at high levels.

Throughout Chinese history, there have been many women who have made their marks in qigong history. Additionally, there have been famous female poets, gifted scholars, generals, and physicians, as well as many well-known female masters of qigong, martial arts, and the *I Ching*. A few of them are mentioned below.

- ❖ Some females have been recognized as immortals and spiritual leaders, such as Madame Wei Tsun-hua (Jin Dynasty, A.D. 265–420). Madame Wei was the founder of an important Taoist branch at the Mountain Mao Monastery. Her book, *Huang Ting Classic*, is one of the most important books on qigong. It contains information such as formulas for preparing a qigong practitioner's body for higher level practice. Madame Wei was a high official's daughter; she was very erudite and also an expert at making longevity formulas. According to legend, she left our planet by "stepping on her sword, suddenly flying up, and disappearing at the age of 87."

- ❖ (As mentioned earlier) the female Immortal Sun, Bu-er (Song Dynasty, A.D. 960–1279) was also a Taoist leader. Immortal Sun assisted her husband, Immortal Ma Chong-Yang, in establishing the Taoist House in their home and financially helped five other Taoists who all were the disciples of Immortal Wang. (These seven became the famous Seven Immortals who all attained Tao and contributed much knowledge to qigong history. Immortal Sun was one of the first Immortals to attain Tao among the seven. Their statues are still worshipped today in the White Clouds Monastery in Beijing.
- ❖ Of course, you have heard the story of the martial artist, Mu-Lan. Mu-Lan learned martial arts from her father at a young age. She then joined the army disguised as a man to fight in place of her father. Her story is still popular in China today and is told in various operas.

I have named but a few of the famous women from China's ancient history but many more exist. There are more female immortals whose names will be mentioned in the poems that I have translated and included throughout this book. It is my hope that, through cultivation and qigong, we will strengthen our physical and mental conditions and that more women can rise above adversity and perform to their fullest potential just as these women have done.

In China, there are thousands of ancient books written by sages who preserved their health and lengthened their life spans. In their texts they share with us how they preserved their lives and how they revealed their inner beings. During my ten years of research and study of qigong and my many years of practicing it, I have learned that, in many ways, we are all the same regardless of race, culture, religion, or age. We all possess internal powers that can be brought out by qigong practice. Such human potential can be cultivated and used to prevent illness, heal an illness that has already occurred, develop the confidence to overcome obstacles and form harmonious relationships with others. The list of what can be accomplished by revealing such potential is virtually limitless. The methodologies that develop human potential for health prevention, however, are still an open question to modern science.

Because of its long-lasting qigong culture, China is a gold mine of natural healthcare methodologies. However, one can only grow by understanding this culture. Whoever sets her (or his) mind on digging will find the gold and become “wealthy.”

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