

INTRODUCTION TO INTERACTIVE VITALITY / QIGONG - THE EIGHT BROCADES PROGRAM -



A wellness practice for cultivation of vitality

Qigong is an umbrella term for a holistic approach to wellness that is based on natural, restorative, intention-based movement, combined with imagery, sensitivity, and breathing patterns. It can also be considered a body-heart-mind “hygiene”, philosophical outlook and a life-style, and a path of learning and change. It facilitates a “positive” notion of health, contributes to longevity, and helps with stress management. Because anyone can do it – regardless of age, profession or physical condition – and because it reduces dependency on external help, it is a genuine self-empowering practice. Individuals becomes the principal source of self-care and healing, while also contributing to productivity of organizations, and prosperity of communities.

Qigong has an ancient history in China that goes back to at least 2nd millennium BC, involving also Wu, female healer-shamans¹. It still preserves the primordial character, but with modern application. It is usually interpreted as practice/mastery of cultivation of vital “energy/force/breath” and has been evolving through systemic experimentation and through exchange with other practices (Kundalini Yoga from India or Kum Nye from Tibet). It informed a similar practice in Japan (Do-In), but it also provided the basis for the Vitalism movement in 19th century Europe promoted by the founder² of modern gymnastics. In a way, Qi Gong is Chinese version of “Vital/Healthy Mind in Vital/Healthy Body” (mens sana in corpore sano).



The basic elements of Qigong are similar to primordial practices developed elsewhere, including in Ancient Greece (iatromantis³, the “healers”) , in Egypt⁴, in Central Asia, in Slavic tribes, and in a number of indigenous people worldwide. The main difference between Qigong and other practices is that it has gone through a several millennia of iterative scientific development (with remarkable consistency in application!). Qigong is also non-dogmatic and inclusive so anyone can do it, regardless of cultural or religious background. Ultimately, it is prudent: the only criterion is that something *works*.

¹ In Ancient China, the ideogram for women (wu) also meant “to heal”.

² It is said that Per Henrik Ling based his doctrine on Daoist Gong-Fu, the name most Europeans exposed to Chinese traditions early on used for what is today Qigong.

³ Those includes, amongst other, Parmenides, Empedocles and Pythagoras.

⁴ Similarly to medicine, Egyptian tradition is most certainly older than Chinese, at least judging by the oldest found medical document called Papyrus Ebers, dating back to 1550 BC with the content going further back for at least another 2000 years. However, it is only the Chinese medicine, wellness life style (Yang Sheng) and what today is known as Qigong that are based on a continuous application and development millennia,

Qigong represents a wide framework of practices based on certain core principles – it is not one thing or one set of exercises. It is similar to saying “wellness” or “health practice”. There are thousands⁵ of styles of Qigong with even more variety in applications. Qigong includes the basic elements of classical Chinese medicine, “internal” martial arts such as Ba Gua Zhang or Ta Ji Quan, and the wellness life-style known as Nourishing Life (Yang Sheng).

The evasive Qi

Qigong relates to Qi, a “force”/“energy”, which can be understood as “breath of life” or “respiration”/“flow”/“circulation”- or simply through the overall outcome it produces: vitality. Chinese language does not distinguish between nouns and verbs, so Qi can/does mean also Qi-ing as a process. It should be noted that the concept of Qi, while quite evasive, creates additional confusion because of multiple connotations. In China, there is more than one “qi” with the use of that concept including as diverse meanings as “heavenly qi”, meaning weather, and the “Cosmic Qi”, the first mover in the Daoist cosmogeny. Chinese Qi, as applied in the context of Qigong and Chinese medicine, is similar to concepts from other traditions. Beside prana in India, it was known in the pre-Socratic times of Ancient Greece as pneuma; amongst the Kung Sun people in Africa’s Kalahari Desert as num; in North America by Navajo as nilch’i and by Lakota as ni; and in Hawaii as ha (as in Aloha: meeting face-to-face of the “breath of life”). In Christianity, via Judaism, the traces of the “breath of life” by which God created Adam could still be found in the notion of Spiritus Sancti.



Most importantly for Qi Gong, Qi has three main manifestations on the plane of human existence⁶, related to the three different locations of “treasure chests” (Dantian, “the field of golden elixir”). The dense energy is Jing; the breath is Qi more narrowly understood; and the most subtle is Shen. Jing, representing bodily liquids, is mixed with Qi from breath. When further risen, it transforms into Shen. However, all three “types” of energy flow across the whole body in a complex dynamic. This is sometimes represented as the dynamic between “fire” (Yang) and “water” (Yin) where each contains the “seed” of the other one – as represented by the Taiji (Yin-Yang) symbol, which emerges from *Wu Ji*, where the Qi, on a cosmic plane was the One Qi.

Qi feels for humans like water for a fish: it is inside and around us, but we do not necessarily realize its existence. It manifests differently in different contexts, and some of those have been validated by Western science in Western medical research and quantum mechanics. Essentially, it has vibrational property (it is a wave as much as a particle/matter) that includes sensations of warmth, sound, and color; emotional reactions; and tingling or other subtle sensations inside and around the body. Qi is influenced by movement and intention, but breathing is the most powerful and effective method because it is the only function of our bodies that is both automatic and under our conscious control.

More recently in the “West”, Qi was related to fascia, which is a network of connecting tissue wrapping internal organs, cavities, muscles, and the whole body and representing a communication medium through electric impulses. There is also a direct convergence between meridians of fascia and Qi meridians, as applied in Qigong and Chinese medicine. This is one of the reasons that physical manipulation through movement and touch produces physiological effect on muscles, bones, ligaments and joints, and nerves, and influences circulation of blood

⁵ By one count, there were 7000 styles only in China. This, of course, depends on how a “style” is defined.

⁶ However, we can also refer to specific kinds of Qi, such as *Wei Qi* that provides basic defense against external impacts, or Qi specific to Organ Networks (eg Qi of Spleen).

and other liquids, functioning of internal organs and metabolism, regulation of nervous system and hormonal balance – reflected through the holistic notion of Qi Dynamic.

Diverse applications of Qigong

Qigong is based on gentle, “therapeutic” movements combined with breath, imagery, and intention. It is a “mindfulness” and stress management approach because of its meditative, “relaxing” nature. However, Qigong is more than a mind practice because it includes a comprehensive approach to body, heart and mind as an integrated whole. Qigong typically includes a set of exercises that typically lasts from 2-3 min to 1 hour. Each individual is considered different, so the emphasis is on core principles and patterns for applying alignments and motions facilitating integration of movement, imagery, intention, and breath. The principles are derived from a particular understanding of human physiology and natural rhythms, philosophical underpinnings of Daoism (Yin-Yang, Cosmology), primordial spiritual practices, and classical Chinese medicine. However, Qigong has nothing to do with any institutionalized religion and practicing Qigong is purely a secular endeavour.

In *Interactive Vitality (Qi gong)* the emphasis is on working with our bodies to improve vitality through iterative facilitation of self-regulation of the Qi Dynamic. While exercises have a particular focus, the aim is to address the body-heart-mind as one complex and fully integrated system. Applied that way, it ensures that “the total is more than the sum of the parts”. The approach is also interactive because it assumes that we need to navigate a dynamic equilibrium (“balancing act”) of opposing but complementary intentions and actions. The interaction is manifested between internal and external movement; loosening/relaxation and intention; breath and alignments; focused practice and a broader life-style; and between “steering”/governing and “rowing”/managing vitality flows. It is ultimately about a “technology” for using our own body-heart-mind intelligence in more productive ways and for more sustainable results.

The emphasis is first put on the physical plane by working with fascia, muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments, internal organs, and the circulatory system. The goal is to remove blockages and improve flows, but also to build “defensive” capability (Wei Qi) and nourish Organ Networks that improves immunity and resilience - both holistically and for individual parts. It seeks to restore the natural balance and then facilitate dynamic response daily physical and psychological stress and strain. After developing initial foundation, the practice reorients towards “internalization” and more subtle sensations and intentions.



Dao Yin Tu – the earliest known graphic representation of Qigong (168 BC)

This catalytic and holistic outlook is based on the understanding that one of the greatest challenges of 21st century is dealing with disruptive change. This has to do with knowing when to stand still and when to move; when to retreat and when to advance; what to keep and what to let go; and to discern between what is temporary and what is important on a longer term. Conventional methods are increasingly ineffective, and they often tend to aggravate the problem

they are trying to address. Focusing on root-causes in a systemic, integrated, and interactive manner is the most essential, creative and empowering competence for thriving of individuals, organizations and communities.

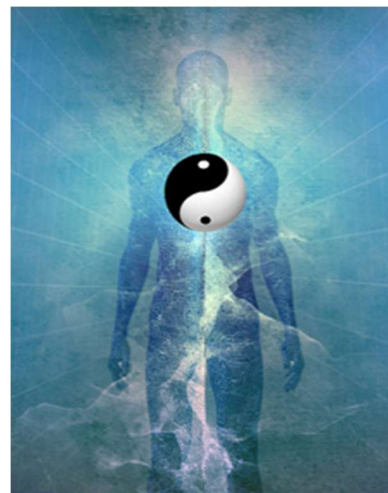
Catalytic benefits of Qigong

The practice can be done individually or in groups, and it has proven benefits for organizational/business performance. It is also emerging as an approach that contributes to community development and resilience because of its empowering nature, facilitating social re-integration, and promoting sustainable lifestyles. It is a complementary practice for everyday fitness and for professional athletes, while it has a major application in the healthcare sector overall, in particular on addressing the “burden of disease”⁷. Ultimately, Qi Gong improves not only the life-span but also the health-span.

The exercises are slow and gentle, but they can lead to catalytic and sustained results, if the daily practice is maintained over a period of time. They apply a holistic approach by which improvements in one area support improvements across the whole body-heart-mind system. The health of internal organs and circulation of liquids defines the overall health of the organism, so it tends to focus on those, producing a multiplier effect. In other words, such systems change approach assumes high interdependence within and around us, by which a series of “simple” movements represent leverage points for transformative effect for the individual organism, and the surrounding communities and organizations.

Most Qigong programs support prevention and/or complement medical treatment for chronic disease. Qigong is not taught or practiced as a medical treatment and the exercises should not be considered medical remedies (except when prescribed by a certified Chinese medicine physician). However, there is evidence⁸ from Western science that Qi Gong contributes to, amongst other, the following health benefits:

- Improved cardiovascular function and blood pressure;
- Reduced inflammation;
- Increased immunity, bones density, and quality of blood;
- Reduced anxiety, depression, and addictions;
- Pain relief, improved coordination, and stronger muscles;
- Improved cognitive performance; and
- Increased efficiency of cell metabolism and tissue regeneration.



The practice of QiGong also helps dealing with chronic stress by improving key stress biomarkers and it contributes to removing blockages and stagnant energy, nourishing the whole organism, detoxifying the body, toning the mind and the spirit, relieving pain – all of which make more energy available for a quality lifestyle.

⁷ It represents a multi-dimensional impact of health problems used by the World Health Organization. The impact includes economic and fiscal aspects. Current data show that minimum 75% of all diseases globally is preventable.

⁸ For instance: A Comprehensive Review of Health Benefits of Qi Gong”, the American Journal of Health Promotion, 2010.

Core Vitality Framework

The Interactive Qigong approach is based on customized (bespoke) programs informed by participants' profiles, experience, and needs, while taking into consideration the overall goal of developing a personal practice. It incorporates *a series of iterative phases*:

- improving awareness, intention, imagery, sensitivity and "relaxation";
- alignments in postures and movements,
- removing blockages and stagnation,
- regulating flows and Qi Dynamic, and
- nourishing, storing and (re)directing vitality.

This requires understanding, embodying, and continuously advancing the application of *essential capabilities and principles*, including the following ones:

- Sensitivity and imagery,
- Song (loosening / "relaxation"), and effort/energy efficiency,
- The 2x2 Awareness Matrix
- Drawing Silk (no gaps / dotted lines) with "open" joints and integrated movements,
- Interaction between vertical (Ding & Sinking Tian Gan) and horizontal (Yao) planes,
- Yin-Yang changes, transformations, and "overlaps",
- Yi Bu Yi ("intention with no intention") with "no lingering - no wondering",
- Relating to basic organ anatomy and Organ Networks, and
- 24h Qigong: cultivation through observation, learning and integrative lifestyle.

Based on the above, specific and tailor-made programmes are designed on the basis of the needs, preferences and aspirations of the practitioners.

Eight (Silken) Brocades Qigong

What is the Eight Brocades Qigong?

The long name - Eight Silken Pieces of Brocade or Eight Silk Brocades (Ba Duan Jin) – indicates that an approach with eight movement, each done as "pulling the silk". The Chinese brocades are also colorful relating to the multiple aspects and benefits⁹ of each movement.

Arguably, it is the most popular Qigong practices globally and one of the only two officially approved by the Government of China. There are many variations, but also a great deal of consistency, in particular in terms of the intentions of each movement. A total of eight movements (with opening and closing) is also manageable, both to learn and to limit the time for daily practice (10-20min depending on repetitions and on how slow they are performed). It is also one of the most "all-around" program, which is good for beginners, preferably after some foundational practice, and also good for advanced practitioners as they can always explore new perspective and go "deeper". This program can also be easily supplemented with another program before (e.g. standing or moving meditation and Marrow Washing) or after (e.g. Express Qigong).

⁹ For a Western science analysis, see for instance: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Baduanjin Qigong for Health Benefits: Randomized Controlled Trials, Evidence-Based Alternative and Complementary Medicine, Volume 2017, Article ID 4548706

The Eight Brocades are a good combination and a good balance between externalize movement and internalized focus and imagery/intention. They can be performed more vigorously (as at some points in the past) or through a smooth, calming flow – or anything in between. Conversely, the movements have external manifestation for mobility and on a more superficial layer (i.e. fascia), but also regulate and nourish Internal Organ Networks. Each movement can also be formed as a stand-alone for 1-3 minutes.

"Daily practice of the Eight Brocade Exercises develops a refined strength that can be likened to crude metal that is gradually transformed into tempered steel. This tempering is achieved through slow, steady movements that exercise the muscles evenly throughout their full range of motion. By moving slowly with focused attention, chains of muscles contract and relax synergistically, without engaging the inhibitory reflexes that can interfere with muscle contraction and reduce the applied force of the body's strength". (Tom Bisio)

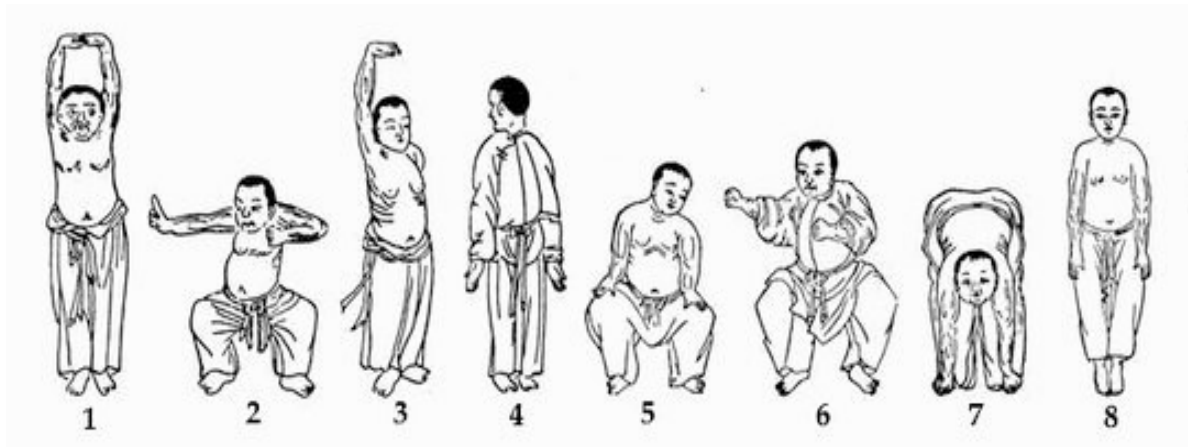
Quick overview of the history

The Eight Brocades Qigong has a long history, probably going back to two and a half millennia, as a part of broader Dao Yin tradition. Despite the pragmatic nature of this practice, the origins are, as often in Chinese traditions, woven into mythology. According to Ken Cohen, the 8th century "Ten Treatises of Restoring the Original Vitality" attributes the development of the Eight Brocades to Chong Li-Quan, one of the Eight Immortals of Chinese folklore. The Chinese Health Qigong Association states that the Eight Brocades date back to the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). It is also believed that this practice relates to a set of twelve exercises developed by a famous General Yue Fei which were, in contrast to modern application, done in an "external" manner with vigour and while carrying the weight of military equipment to improve strength and stamina. The 13-14th centuries' "Ten Books on the Cultivation of Perfection" includes essays and illustrations of a seated version of the Eight Brocades. It was only in the 1800s that the Eight Brocades applied the format that is widely practiced today: as a "soft" Qigong or Neigong, standing, and done through slow, loose movements for health benefits.

Names and intentions of individual exercises

As in most other similar practices, the names of movements are very important as they transmit the intention and imagery and indicate how the exercises are to be performed. The information presented below also includes anticipated benefits for each exercise, not to claim a medical outcome, but to further inform how they should be performed and manifested. These benefits are only the ones that are in the primary focus because all eight have a broader catalytic impact across the whole body-mind system and Qi Dynamic. Overall, these exercises simultaneously operate on three layers: physical (e.g. muscles, fascia, joints), regulatory (in relation to Organ Networks of Chinese Medicine and Daoist tradition), and the therapeutic (in particular through relaxation, massage of internal organs and improving the flows of blood, lymph and other liquids). While typically done together (as a set or a flow), each exercise can be performed individually, as a stand-alone, and still provide holistic benefits for improving general vitality.

Note that the listed intentions/benefits are assumed on the basis of the tradition and collective experiences, and they do not guarantee medical outcomes or represent a medical treatment.



1. Scoop Down and Uphold the Sky

- Regulates the Triple Warmer (gut, solar plexus and chest) and facilitates "uprightness", while integrating the body along the vertical axis and connecting lower, upper and lateral movements and alignments.

2. Draw the Bow and Let the Arrow Fly

- Regulates the Lungs, Heart and Kidney Organ Networks, while strengthening the tendons associated with the legs, spine/core and shoulders, and improving balance, structural alignment and coordination.

3. Separate Heaven and Earth

- Regulates the Spleen and Stomach Organ Networks, supporting digestion and facilitating coordination between upper and lower, and left and right sides of the body and the nervous system, adding the "X factor" and spiral alignments.

4. Wise Own Turns its Head

- Addresses fatigue and stress, and loosens tension in the neck and head, while regulating the "central channel", loosening and opening the chest, and improving eye mobility and eye-body coordination.

5. Big Bear Turns from Side to Side

- Reduces the "heart fire" (heat), while loosening and opening the hip area (kua), strengthening the "core" and legs, and improving the overall body integration across different planes of movement.

6. Bend Back and Touch Toes

- Regulates the Kidneys and Bladder Organ Networks, while loosening and opening the "central channel", and strengthening the spine, lower back, hips and legs.

7. Punch with Angry Gaze

- Regulates excesses related to Liver and Gall Bladder Organ Networks (and indirectly the Pericardium Organ Network), while strengthening arms and shoulders, legs and hips, improving the plasticity of eyes, and facilitating transitions between tension and relaxation, a fighting spirit and a yielding spirit, and assertiveness and acceptance.

8. Shake the body to prevent 100 diseases

- Applies vibrating/shaking to regulate the overall Qi Dynamic (metabolism) improving immunity and vitality of sinews and internal organs, while releasing tension throughout the body-mind by removing blockages and opening the feet.

Additional: **Express Qigong**

1. Shaking; Patting / Tapping / Slapping; Scratching / Brushing / Dusting; and basics of Self-massage (An-Mo) with selected acu-points
2. Relief sounds (Yawning with the Lion face, Sigh/"whisper", Mmmm)

Wrapping-up

- Opening/Closing, Bowing, and Wu Ji

Frequently asked questions

How much do I need to learn it?

Basic exercises can be learned in a few sessions. Preferably, a new programme should then be practiced for 100 days (or over three months) straight to establish a sound foundation. However, learning an exercise is only the first step: to develop the practice and reap more benefits from it, you need dedicated, regular routine over a longer period of time. The more we practice the more we learn and improve, and the more benefits are generated. Through regular practice, you continuously learn about yourself, which is constantly changing (today, you are not the same you from yesterday, even less you from a couple of weeks or months). Qi Gong is not something that can be learned once and then applied through robotic repetitions.

How long does a daily practice take?

Qi Gong requires minimal investment of time and the time spent for Qi Gong is less time wasted on insomnia or depression; less medication for pain relief and preventable disease; and less time spent in the waiting room of a health clinic. Practicing from 10-20min to 40-60min on most days will provide tangible benefits. Due to the modular nature of the Interactive Qigong, the overall time can be divided into several smaller timeslots. Some exercises can be done as a stand-alone or even when doing something else (while watching TV, standing in a line in the bank, or riding on a subway). As for the overall integrated lifestyle, we should apply the 24h Qi Gong mindset throughout the day. Metaphorically speaking, we should always walk like a white crane, seat like a turtle, and sleep like a deer.

What is the role of intention?

Our bodies are self-regulated, but we can influence it by focusing our intention through internal awareness. Where the intention goes, Qi follows, and with it also blood and internal liquids. If our mind is scattered, we lack focus and we dissipate the energy and undermine the balance in the body, heart, and mind. When we feel a pain, our mind focuses and "orders" the body to use all its powers to address the issue. However, one of the goals in Qi Gong is to achieve "intention with no intention" (Yi Ba Yi): the mind needs to be full, while completely empty; empty, while completely full. This means that we should not force the intention, but use it as a kind, gentle guide. Moreover, the intention should not be either lingering (too much narrow focus) or wondering (too little focus).

Why using metaphors and imagery?

We can help regulate our bodies through breath, movement, and life style. But, the most powerful is the of imagery and metaphors because this is the "language" of the subconsciousness. There does not need to be anything dogmatic or mystified in that, for as long as we do not understand metaphors literary. However, Qi Gong avoids daydreaming and excessive visualizations because those tend to bring us "out" of the body.

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Disclaimers

1. *"The material on Interactive Qi Gong provided in this document is for educational purposes only and not intended to replace the advice of a physician or healthcare practitioner, and not intended to diagnose or treat injury, illness or disease."*

2. *"By joining an Interactive Qi Gong session, the participants consent to the following:*

- *The participation in the sessions is purely voluntary. Participants will be free at all times to choose not to continue the participation in the session, leave, and stop practicing the exercises presented at the sessions.*
- *The sessions are not a substitute for medical attention, examination, diagnosis, or treatment. They are not presented for medical purposes, and they should not be considered a medical treatment in any sense. Any health benefits attributed to these exercises, whether mentioned or inferred, are not advocated or promised.*
- *Each participant is responsible for making their own judgement and initiative in choosing how to perform and apply the exercises without posing a risk of injury to themselves and others. The lead coach is not responsible for the manner in which the exercises are performed by the participants and for any physical or mental injury, harm or illness which may be related to that.*
- *Participants should consider consulting with their physician or other competent medical professional regarding their individual suitability for performing the exercises presented at the session. It is also important that the participants do not reduce, change, or discontinue any medication or treatment without consulting your physician first."*