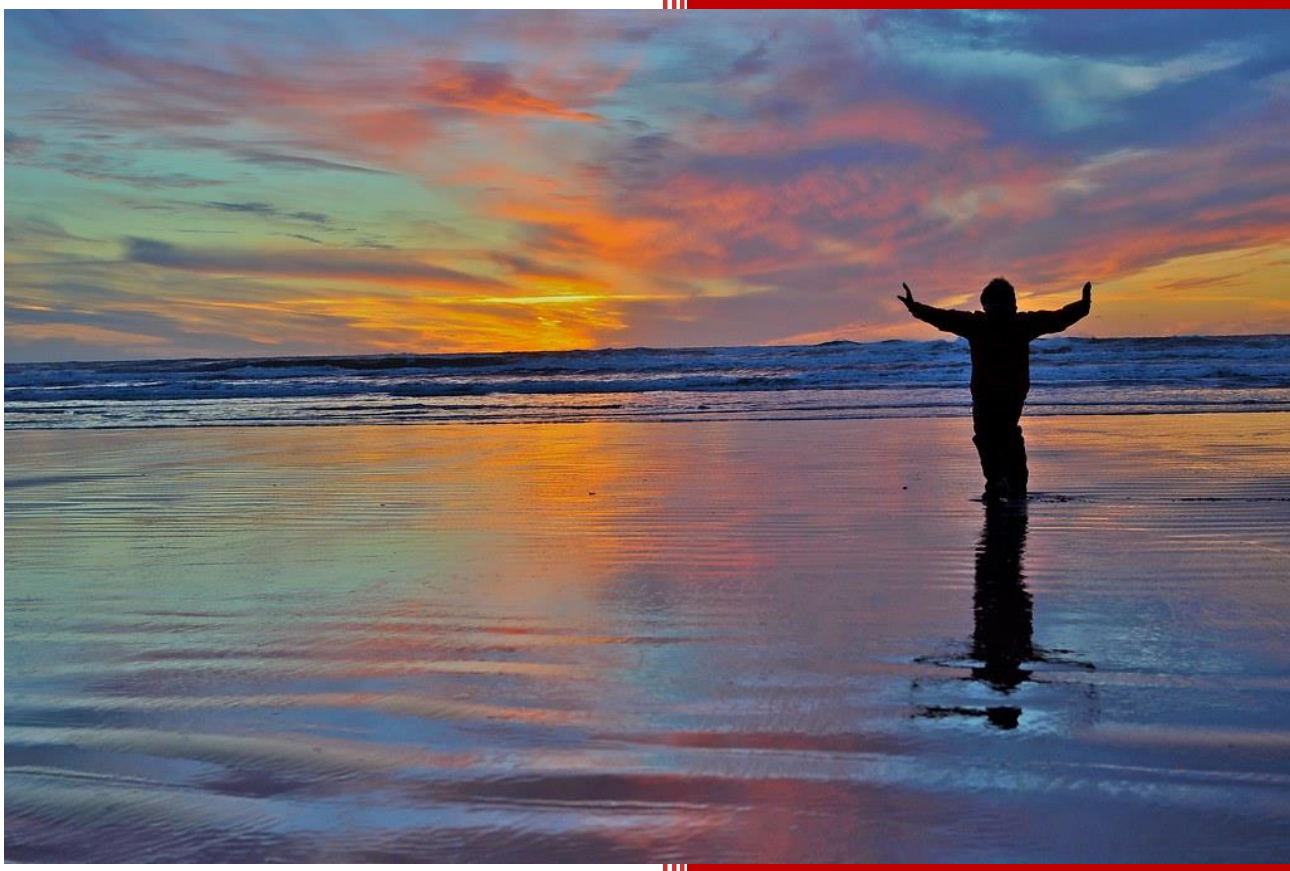
Tai Chi & Qigong
Union for Great Britain

Qigong Booklet



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Introduction

We owe Marnix Wells a debt of gratitude for the material in this booklet which covers many aspects of Qigong. It would be impossible for this to be a definitive article covering everything but rather it aims to introduce just some of the many and varied concepts and ideas.

About the author

Marnix studied taìjíquán and internal martial arts in the Far East from 1968, with Master Wángshùjin and his disciple Zhang Yizhong; Gan Xiàozhou; Hóng Yìmián; and others. More recently, in this country, he has been learning Zhàobâo tàijí with Liú Yâz' 'Master Yaz'. Marnix is a graduate in classical Chinese from Oxford and Phd SOAS. He has published interpretative translations from Chinese of Scholar Boxer, Pheasant Cap Master and Heguanzi: the Dao of Unity.

About us

Founded over 30 years ago, the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain (TCUGB) is for everyone interested in Tai Chi and other Internal Arts such as Baguazhang, Xing Yi Chuan etc.

We welcome all styles and all levels of ability in these arts from the simply curious to highly experienced teachers. Whatever your understanding we are here to support you with information including where to find classes from one of our approved instructors.

We set the standards for teaching Tai Chi, bringing health and well-being to many thousands of people throughout the UK.

We are a not-for-profit organisation run by members for members. We are volunteers supported by just one part-time, paid member of staff.

We are a Community Interest Company (C.I.C.) and this booklet is produced as part of our commitment to provide information about Tai Chi and the Internal Arts freely available to all.

Find out more about us here: www.taichiunion.com

Further reading

On our website you will find our Tai Chi Booklet with material by the same author.

You may like to look at our website for books and DVDs by our members.

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What is Qigong?

Qigong is the modern umbrella term for a range of exercises aimed at developing skills with the body's energy. Currently, it is divided into five main overlapping traditions; Medical, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and Martial. The central aspect of these traditions is health.

Qigong is composed of two words which Chinese dictionaries define as follows.

- Qi: air, gas; smell; vigour; spirit; anger; atmosphere; attitude.
- Gong: meritorious service; achievement; result; skill.

Selection from those choices gives qigong today's meaning of 'vital energy skill' and many other similar variants from these choices.

Although throughout history, qigong had many names, the current name has no conceptual or semantic relationship to the historical literature. Today's name has only become the accepted term since the 1950s. Before that, the oldest and most diverse form is daoyin. One of the foremost Chinese academic sites for the study of these exercises is the Daoyin Yangsheng Centre at the Beijing University of Physical Exercise.

However, although I personally talk about daoyin, I also take note of a passage in the *Xunxi*, a 3rd-century BCE philosophical text. According to this passage, 名聞而實喻名之用也 (When a name is heard, the reality is conveyed; such is the usefulness of a name). Thus, for the sake of this article, I will continue to use the modern name qigong. More about the origin of the name later.

Within qigong, qi has three aspects.

- Qi refers to the air breathed in and out and through qigong, which can improve the respiration function.
- Qi is the medium through which we connect all parts of the body and interact.
- Qi is the very essence of human life and qigong contributes to the growth of this substance.

Qigong Traditions

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Qigong History Part 1: Pre-Imperial China (up to 221 BCE)

The history of qigong in this period comes under the heading of 'fact, fiction, myth, and speculation. And, to play 'devil's advocate', there are four concerns that can beset people researching qigong in its early development.

- *Pareidolia*: The tendency, when looking at something, for perception to impose a meaningful interpretation, so that one sees an object, pattern, or meaning where there is none.
- *Motivated Perception*: Seeing what one wants to see.
- *Motivated Reasoning*: Coming to conclusions one is predisposed to believe in.
- *Confirmation Bias*: The tendency to look for and interpret information that supports their view. All the qigong information in the pre-imperial era is debatable and the history presented here follows the most commonly held beliefs.

The first use of the term qigong is another contested area. Many Chinese textual researchers agree it first appeared in the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE) in the *Lian jian zi*, a book written by the Daoist priest, Xu Xun. This text now only exists in the compendium *Jingming zongjiao lu*, which was printed around 1691 CE in the Qing Dynasty and, because of this, some researchers place the first use of the name in the Qing Dynasty.

The modern name qigong came to prominence after it was used by the Beidaihe Qigong Sanatorium and endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s to emphasise health and scientific approaches, while de-emphasising spiritual practices and mysticism.

As stated, the oldest term for qigong is daoyin. Daoyin is often translated as gymnastics. However, daoyin has significant differences from the modern understanding of gymnastics. The daoyin exercises are based on the accumulation and conservation one's energy. But the practice of present-day gymnastics requires the consumption of energy.

Dao (guiding) refers to the fact that physical movements are guided by the strength of the mind and stimulate the internal flow of qi within the body. Yin (pulling) means that with the aid of physical movements, qi can reach the extremities of the body.

The term daoyin first occurs in *Zhuangzi*, a late Warring States Period (476–221 BCE) text.

The pre-imperial history covers Neolithic period (c. 8500-2070 BCE), Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BCE), Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1050 BCE), Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE), and Warring States period (c. 475-221 BCE).

Neolithic period (c. 5000-2000 BCE)

Some researchers believe qigong began either 7000 or 8000 years ago. A quick examination of Chinese history shows little evidence of this idea.

First appearance of Chinese script is in the Shang Dynasty Archaic Language Period (1200-1000 BCE). This was only on oracle-bones and, therefore, contained no historical information. The first time we can look at factual historical evidence for qigong is in the following Pre-Classical Language Period (1000-600 BCE).

The main claim is down to a single piece of 7000-year-old pottery which appears to show a person in qigong-like posture (*pareidolia?*).

Although various traditions of qigong try to trace their roots back to legendary people like Pengzu (the Chinese Methuselah), the immortals Chisongzi (Master Redpine) and Wang Ziqiao and the ancient master Ningfengzi, who have specific sets of exercises names after them it is also clear the best speculations, we have is qigong evolved from shamanic rituals and dance during this period.

Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BCE)

Legends claim this as the first Chinese Dynasty with Yu the Great as the first emperor, but there was little proof that the dynasty actually existed. It is not until the Zhou Dynasty, 554 years later, that we see any writings of this first Chinese dynasty. For this reason, it was believed to be mythical, but new archaeological evidence now shows the dynasty to have been real. However, there is no information on qigong during this dynasty.

Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1050 BCE)

As previously stated, this dynasty is the earliest recorded Chinese dynasty supported by solid archaeological evidence and positive proof of the first written records.

The *Yijing* (Book of Changes)—possibly from this period, but more likely to be from the following Zhou Dynasty—was the first known Chinese book related to qi. It introduced the concept of the three "natural energies" or "powers" (san cai): tian (heaven), di (earth), and ren (man). Studying the relationship between these three natural powers was the first step in the development of qigong.

Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-256 BCE)

This dynasty was the longest in the history of China, ruling the region for almost 8 centuries. It had two periods, the Western Zhou (c. 1046-771 BCE) and the Eastern Zhou (c. 771-256 BCE). The Eastern Zhou is further divided into the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.

Although the Western Zhou is considered the period when Chinese civilization had its genesis, it was in the Eastern Zhou period that Daoism and Confucianism emerged with their influences on qigong practice.

Eastern Zhou—Spring and Autumn Period (c. 770-476 BCE)

In the book *Daodejing* (Classic of the Way of Power) ascribed to Laozi, chapters 6 and 29 contain text which mention breathing in a qigong manner. Although the date of this text is debatable, the oldest excavated portion dates back to the late 4th century BCE.

Eastern Zhou—Warring States Period (c. 475-221 BCE)

Qigong is absorbed into the Yangsheng tradition that was evolving in this period. Yangsheng, generally translated as 'nourishing life', is the umbrella term for various self-cultivation practices, now considered as being primarily Daoist inspired. These longevity techniques are to keep the body healthy and maintain homeostasis by nourishing and prolonging life.

According to the 'Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,' Daoist self-cultivation practices can be divided into three categories: meditation, alchemy and yangsheng. The yangsheng category includes such practices as qigong, breathing, sexual hygiene and dietetics.

However, the 'Encyclopaedia of Taoism' widens the yangsheng practices to include massage, meditation and visualisation, healing, and rules of daily behaviour.

This indicates that the definition of yangsheng is very fluid and still evolving. No definitive list of what constitutes yangsheng practices can be made. It has changed over time and continues to change even today. One thing that has not changed is the inclusion of the core practice of qigong.

Qigong developed into a fairly systematic art for the preservation of health in this period. For example, a book believed to be compiled during this period, *Huangdi neijing* (The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic), contains records of qigong, many of which deal with methods of practice, symptoms, effects and points for attention. In the book, a dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and the renowned doctor, Qibo, stresses the combination of medical treatment with qigong exercises.

Actual practical details were found in jade. The *Xingqi* (circulating breath) instructions for practicing qigong were engraved around 400 BCE on a dodecagonal block of jade in what appears to be Seal Script.

The *Neiye* (Inner Cultivation) text, dated between 350-300 BCE, had profound effects on the development of qigong and the encouragement of daily self-cultivation.

Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (c. 369-286 BCE) described the relationship between health and the breath in Chapter 3—titled *Yangsheng zhu* (Principal of Nourishing Life)—of his book *Zhuangzi* which confirms that a breathing method for qi circulation was being used by some Daoists at that time.

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Qigong History Part 2: Imperial China to modern day

Qin (221-206 BCE)

The first dynasty was very short and little happened, in terms of innovation, in the qigong world that has yet to be discovered.

Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 20 CE)

The Han dynasty is normally divided into two parts: the Western/Former Han (206 BCE-9 CE) and the Eastern/Later Han (25-220). For simplicity, here it will be treated as one long dynasty.

In 1983, at the Zhangjiashan burial site in Jiangling county, Hubei province, in tomb number 247, archaeologists excavated the resting place of a Han official who was interred in 186 BCE. Among the many texts recovered in this tomb was a bamboo-strip document, the *Yinshu* (Pulling Book), which is the earliest existing text specifically on qigong. This document, with a step-by-step guide to movement, illustrates how using qigong through daily and seasonal exercises was a key regimen to build strong healthy bodies and self-treat illness.

In 1963 at Mawangdui, near Changsha, Hunan province, three tombs were discovered, but it was not until between 1972-1974 that archaeologists explored these tombs.

Tomb number 3, dated to 168 BCE, was a treasure trove of military, medical, and astronomical manuscripts. These texts, written on silk, were of major historical significance. The medical category contained the now famous *Daoyin tu* (Daoyin Diagram, also known as the *Guoyin tu*).

Copies of this chart of 44 qigong exercises now hang on the walls of qigong training centres all over the world. Its importance to qigong history is immense and many modern qigong routines are named after this chart.

Another text found here was *Quegu Shiqi Pian,* a book that is mainly concerned with breathing methods.

The famous doctor, Hua Tuo (141-208), was the creator of the *wuqinxi* (Five-Animal Play), a qigong set based on the movements of tigers, deer, bears, apes and birds that, over almost the next 2000 years, had spawned hundreds of variations. Fortunately, most of the poor versions died out and we are left with probably a few dozen effective variations today. These variations may also contain a completely different set of five animals!

Another famous doctor from this period who recognised the value of qigong was Zhang Zhongjing (150-219), who wrote in his *Jingui yaolue* (Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet),

"… When our limbs feel heavy and uncomfortable, we should do some qigong exercises to get out the stale and take in the fresh …"

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Six Dynasties period (220-589)

Also commonly known as the *period of disunity* as it covers the Three Kingdoms (220-265), the Jin Dynasty (265-420) and the time of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-589).

As mentioned in Part 1, the Daoist priest Xu Xun (239-374) is believed to have been the first to use the term qigong in its modern sense in his book *Ling jian zi* (Miraculous Swordsmanship). He was a regular practitioner of qigong exercises and is said to have lived to the age of 136. However, it is also said the book was not written by Xu Xun himself because many qigong terms in the book were only used after the Song Dynasty, so the book could not be written earlier than that dynasty. This text now only exists in the compendium *Jingming zongjiao lu* (Record of the Lineage and Teachings of [the School of] Purity and Brightness), which was printed around 1691 in the Qing Dynasty. Because of this, some researchers place the first use of the name in the Qing. Whatever the truth, the document states that qigong is used to regulate the body, adjust the breath and align the unity of mind and body—three keys to practice.

Xi Kang (223-262) wrote the *Yangsheng lun* (On Nourishing Life) and although this document is now lost, it is cited over a hundred times in other texts. The *Yangsheng lun* was also known to Zhang Zhan (early 4th century), who wrote *Yangsheng yaoji* (Essentials on Nourishing Life), which is thought to have been one of the main qigong text books during the Six Dynasties. Unfortunately, this text was also lost and survives only in fragments and citations.

The philosopher, Ge Hong (283-343), author of *Zhouhou beijifang* (Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies) and the *Baopuzi* (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity), was very influential in neidan (internal alchemy) and medicine. Qigong became very important to both disciplines. He said “qigong exercises were meant to cure diseases beforehand [prophylactic] and achieve harmony among all elements.”

In the 4th century, the first text dealing systematically with qigong is the *Taiqing daoyin yangsheng jing* (Great Purity Treatise on Healing Exercises and Nourishing Life) attributed to Master Jingli or Jinghei. This manuscript is generally referred to by the shorted name of *Daoyin jing*, and is the only text in the Daoist Canon that deals exclusively with qigong.

Although the work consists of qigong techniques of Daolin (Zhi Dun, 314-366) and those ascribed to the legendary practitioners, Chisongzi, Ningfengzi, Pengzu, Wang Ziqiao. Many scholars believe the text is not earlier than the 6th century.

The age of the text is largely irrelevant to modern practitioners, as it is one of the primary sources of qigong study because it contains a wide range of information about several schools within the tradition.

The *Yangxing yanminglu* (Record on Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life), attributed to Tao Hongjing (452-536), was based on the *Yangsheng yaoji* mentioned above. This text is notable for the association of qigong with anmo (massage). Indeed, the fifth section of this volume is devoted to qigong and anmo. This book also contains the earliest surviving text of the *liuzijue* (Six Character Formula, also called Six Healing/Secret Sounds) of the popular qigong exercise set.

Sui Dynasty (581-618)

China was re-unified under the short-lived Sui Dynasty. This dynasty only had two emperors, but they were both enthusiastic supporters of qigong. In fact, Emperor Yangdi employed many qigong practitioners—who were also massage teachers— at the imperial court, with the objective of establishing qigong as a major component of state medicine.

This led to a major innovation in therapeutic qigong in 610 when Chao Yuanfang (550-630), a doctor of the Imperial Medical Academy, compiled the *Zhubing yuanhou lun* (Treatise on the Origin and Symptoms of Diseases). This encyclopaedia, apart from containing 1,739 medical discussions, prescribes 213 different qigong exercises for 110 different symptoms. It is this compendium that includes many of the qigong exercises from the previously mentioned lost texts.

Tang Dynasty (618-907)

In 652, Sun Simiao (581-682), a renowned physician often called the king of medicine, compiled the *Qianjin yaofang* (Prescriptions Worth a Thousand in Gold) in which he introduced many therapeutic exercises based on qigong, notably a version of the *liuzijue*.

Sima Chengzhen (647-735), the 6th patriarch of the Shangqing school of Daoism and neidan proponent, wrote the *Xiuzhen jingyi zalun* (Miscellaneous Discourses on the Essential Meaning of Cultivating Perfection) which gave exercises to be practised daily and required them to be performed in the correct sequence if they were to be effective in curing disease and maintaining health. This was a new development in qigong.

During the Tang dynasty, qigong continued to be an official part of the Imperial Court Medicine and was generally in the hands of the anmo (massage) specialist.

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960)

This was a chaotic time of political upheaval and division and while there were no new notable developments in qigong, its practice continued and the knowledge was maintained.

Song Dynasty (960-1279)

Qigong and its parent yangsheng practices underwent significant changes from the Song period onward, which integrated the elements drawn from Neidan methods. The introduction of woodblock printing in this period also meant that many of the classical medical texts were re-written or revised and disseminated.

Zhang Junfang (961?-1042?) compiled the *Yunji qiqian* (Seven Slips from a Cloudy Satchel, c. 1029), a collection of Daoist scriptures that contains several qigong routines including *wuqinxi*, *xuanjian daoyin*, Pengzu's qigong and many others.

Qigong found a place in many medical documents written in this period and thereafter. The *Shengji zonglu* (Sagely Benefaction Medical Encyclopaedia, 1117), compiled by staff of the Imperial Medical College, contains two chapters on qigong.

One of today's most popular form of qigong which began in this period was the creation of the baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Brocade). This is ascribed to General Yue Fei (1103-1142) who, according to legend, learned Buddhist Emei mountain style qigong and Daoist Wudang mountain style qigong. Now, there are many versions of *baduanjin*: hard, soft, seated and standing.

The *Daoshu* (Pivot of the Dao, 1136) is a 42-volume compendium of texts compiled by Zeng Zao (fl. 1131-1155) dealing with Neidan and yangsheng, keeping the qigong movement very active and expanding.

Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)

This dynasty (overlapped the Song) was known for its religious tolerance, but this period also saw many disputes between Buddhists and Daoists aiming for emperor's patronage.

The notable legendary figure from this period is Zhang Sanfeng, who is credited with creating Taijiquan

Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Li Shizhen (1518-1593), the eminent physician famous for compiling the monumental *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of Materia Medica) also emphasised the importance of co-ordinating qigong practice.

Illustrations in books became a major feature in Ming publishing and the text entitled *Chifeng sui* (Marrow of the Red Phoenix, 1578), is an illustrated manual on qigong, by the scholar, Zhou Lujing (1549–1640 or 1542-1633). The text contains many qigong routines including *wuqinxi*, *baduanjin* and *liuzijue*.

Zhou Lujing also compiled the illustrated encyclopaedia *Yimen guangdu* (Extensive texts from the peaceful gate, 1597) which likewise contains several qigong routines.

In this period Wang Qi and his son Wang Siyi also compiled an encyclopaedia the *Sancai tuhui* (Illustrations of Heaven, Earth and Man, 1609) which contains drawings of qigong exercises originally devised by Chen Xiyi, (Chen Tuan 871-989), to be carried out at different hours in different periods of the year.

Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

Although Shen Jinao (1717-1776), an outstanding doctor, devoted exclusive chapters of his book *Sheshizun shengshu*(Shen's Experience on the Conservation of Health, 1773), to the treatment of disease through qigong exercise, the Qing Dynasty produced no important works on the subject and the popularity of qigong declined.

Republic period (1912-1949)

Few books with qigong were published in this period and except for *Yinshizi jingzuofa* (Master Yinshi's Quiet Sitting Methods, 1914) by Jiang Weiqiao (1873-1958) and *Weisheng shenglixue mingzhi* (Clear Explanations of Hygiene and Physiology, c.1930) by Daoist master Zhao Bichen (1860–1942) most were of little value.

People's Republic of China (1949-present)

As a whole, qigong was neglected and on the verge of extinction. Fortunately, it was brought back to life in the 1950s when Liu Guizhen opened Qigong Rehabilitation Hospital at Beidaihe, the first clinic to standardise the use of medical qigong. Liu Guizhen is also responsible for the name that came to be used most frequently around the modern world. Qigong. After the success of Beidaihe, over 200 hospitals added qigong to their therapies and the Chinese government organised comprehensive research into the subject. Qigong became popular again and various styles began to be taught openly, and many old books started to be re-published.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) created chaos throughout China on many levels, including banning of all qigong.

After the end of the chaos, in the late 1970s, qigong regained importance in improving and maintaining health, which led to a boom in the practices in the 1980s and 1990s with over 2,000 organisations and anything up to an estimated 200 million practitioners.

However, several of these organisations, like Zhangmi Gong, Zhong Gong and Falun Gong were thought to be turning into cults that threatened the Chinese government—China has a long history of disastrous millennial cults—which, in 1999 started a crackdown on qigong organisations that were perceived to challenge state control, including prohibiting mass qigong practice, shutdown of some qigong clinics and hospitals, and banning groups headed by grandmaster gurus claiming supernatural powers.

For a short period, the name qigong was not used, but in 2000, in an attempt to regulate qigong practice and exclude masters, the Chinese Health Qigong Association was established with the aim of promoting qigong exercise without cults developing around masters. The Association regulated public qigong practice, restricting the number of people that could gather at a time, requiring state approved training and certification of instructors. Initially, only four standardised forms were included, but today that has expanded to nine.

Finally, a quick mention of the early days in the west

The first mention of qigong in the West was in French by Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727–1780), a French Jesuit missionary who introduced qigong, which he called Cong-fou (Kung Fu) to the west in a text written in 1779.

Similarly, the first mention of qigong in English was in 1895, by a Scottish missionary doctor in China, John Dudgeon (1837-1901), wrote the book "Kung-Fu, or Tauist Medical Gymnastics".

A full history of qigong would require several volumes. Therefore, compressing several thousands of years into this short history means that there are many omissions. However, one thing that stands out from this summary is that despite the various traditions of qigong, Medical, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist and Martial, the central tenet has always been an individual's health and most qigong texts are preserved in medical literature. This shows that to understand how the mechanism of qigong works, a basic knowledge Traditional Chinese Medicine is fundamental.

Qigong is now popular throughout the entire world and The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain has recognised the importance of qigong in this modern world and is now called Tai Chi & Qigong Union for Great Britain to encompass those practices.

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