

The Difference between Tai Chi & Qigong

Overview

Tai Chi and Qigong are ancient practices that have led to improved health, fitness, wellbeing and longevity for countless individuals up to the present time. They both cultivate the Qi, also spelt Chi - the life energy that flows through the body's energy pathways - by combining movement, breathing and meditation. Tai Chi and Qigong share the same basic property (Qi), the same fundamental principle (relaxation), and the same fundamental method (slowness). Tai Chi's other principles, methods and applications are distinct to Qigong regarding how the form is practiced, how the energy is manipulated and how the body posture is conditioned.

What is Qi?

Qi is the animating power that permeates the universe and all living things. It is a basis for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) - Qi flows throughout the body's energy pathways, or meridians, to help maintain essential health. The body is unwell when the flow of Qi becomes stagnant or blocked, whereas a free flowing and balanced Qi energizes the organs, systems and cells.

What is Qigong?

Qigong literally means "life energy work" - a way of working with the life energy. It is a healing art, a way of cultivating physical, spiritual, emotional and psychical health, that originated in China about seven thousand years ago, widely practiced by the shaman priests during that primitive era. Qigong is part of Traditional Chinese Medicine and was first detailed in an ancient Chinese medical text book - the Huang Di Nei Jing or Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon - that has been regarded as the fundamental doctrinal source for Chinese medicine for well over two millennia and is still in use today. Subsequent Chinese medical books published in antiquity also reveal detailed theory and the clinical practice of Qigong procedures for treating disease and enhancing health. The art of Qigong can be practiced as physical movement that incorporates breathing exercises, or as stationary meditation.

Categories of Qigong

The art of Qigong has three categories: medical (or healing) Qigong, meditation Qigong and martial Qigong. There are more than two thousand Qigong exercises that comprise of hundreds of different styles, engaged in moving, standing, lying or sitting. Some styles of Qigong foster Qi better than others because of their superior moves and applications - those that are simple are typically more effective and can be excellent for the central nervous system, the chronically ill, and for general health.

Qigong Forms

The forms in Qigong are not nearly as intricate as those in Tai Chi; they need not be executed as precisely. Qigong forms are free in movement and can be merged with an individual's moving manner. The same form may look slightly different depending on the practitioner's style of movement, but it is still the same form, and importantly it provides the same healing benefits even if the movements are not done precisely. Qigong can be carried out standing, sitting or lying down with the whole body still with only the extremities moving, so really anyone can practice Qigong.

Practicing Qigong Forms

Qigong forms are practiced individually: each form is repeated - typically from three or four to nine times - before progressing to the next form. Usually one's practice incorporates from five to perhaps as many as sixty or even more Qigong forms. By repetition, the requisite Qi is generated to replenish the Qi, adequately self-massage the internal organs and benefit the muscles, tendons and ligaments.

What is Tai Chi?

Tai Chi is also a healing art that originated in China more than two thousand years ago. It is a series of continuous, circular, slow, relaxed and smooth flowing movements that has numerous health benefits for people of all ages and health conditions. Tai Chi is not just a form of physical exercise; tremendous Qi is generated and circulates throughout the body when one adheres to certain theories of movement, specific posture alignment and - in one or two of the forms - particular breathing. The calisthenics of Tai Chi attracts many more practitioners than Qigong, as does its feeling of fluidity of movement.

Tai Chi Forms

The forms in Tai Chi follow certain rules and involve intricate body mechanics; both are necessary conditions for the energy and power to be produced. The direction and the flow of the energy and power within the body are controlled by the forms. Done correctly, the form stimulates the energy and power, freeing up blocked pathways and allowing the Qi to flow throughout the body more effectively. The aspirant needs to learn each form to a stage where it can be practiced by oneself, which for a basic form can take up to twenty minutes or more depending on the form and the individual because it involves technique. The Tai Chi forms - except the very simple ones - take considerably longer to learn than even the more complex forms of Qigong. And while everyone has their own natural style of movement, so long as the forms in Tai Chi comply with the specific rules the essence is retained; the forms must adhere to the Tai Chi principles because otherwise the art is not Tai Chi.

Advanced Tai Chi

Tai Chi at a higher level is a form of Qigong, provided that the fundamental principles of Tai Chi are applied in the practice. While low-level Tai Chi is solely a physical exercise, at higher level it transcends into a Qigong discipline. In other words, if there is no Qigong then there is no real Tai Chi - if one cannot master the internal skill of Qigong, then one will not be able to master Tai Chi. If one has mastered Qigong internal skill, then it does not necessarily mean that one is capable of mastering Tai Chi, but if one has mastered real Tai Chi then one has also mastered Qigong internal skill.

The essence of Qigong is critical for Tai Chi, in that it gives one real power throughout the practice of Tai Chi. If one's internal energy skill is insufficient then one's Tai Chi is empty. Of course, this may not be the only reason: the cause could be a violation of the internal principles of Tai Chi which is unfortunately quite common amongst practitioners who are often unaware of the inadequacies in their Tai Chi practice.

About Qi and Chi

Since to the Western ear it sounds as if the word energy is contained in both words, they must mean the same thing. Right? Wrong! The qi, or chi, of qigong means '**energy**', the chi of tai chi does not. In tai chi, the chi means '**ultimate**'.

The 'chi' in tai chi and qigong are almost universally pronounced by Westerners as "chee," which is accurate for qigong and inaccurate for tai chi ("gee") chuan. Commonly, those who both see and mispronounce tai chi as 'chee', also tend to assume both mean the same thing, which they do not.