

# THE MAN WHO INVENTED “QIGONG”

BY JOHN VOIGT

*He defined qigong as the integration of body, breath and mind. This established the norm that influenced all subsequent research and most qigong methods. [David Palmer. Qigong Fever, p. 32]*

## LIU GUIZHEN

**I**n the war-torn China of 1947, a twenty-seven year old clerk working for the Communist Party was sent home on sick-leave to the village of Dasizhuang in Hebei Province. His name was Liu Guizhen (刘贵珍) and he had been suffering from nervous disorders, tuberculosis, and severe gastric ulcers for years. He weighed less than eighty pounds and was expected to soon be dead.

As luck would have it, his paternal uncle Liu Duzhou (刘渡舟), who claimed to be the fifth successor of a secret Buddhist tradition called Neiyang gong 内养功 (“Discipline of Inner Cultivation”), offered to help. Uncle Liu was also experienced in Chinese traditional medicine. [Palmer, p. 30-32]

If there ever were a “qigong boot-camp” nephew Liu was about to experience it. Training was for one hundred days, no visitors, no conversations—(although at times whispering was allowed). Women were excluded, along with any sexual activity. There were no dietary

restrictions (it was wartime and food was hard to get anyway), but it was necessary to drink four to five thermos bottles of water daily, and two of these should be filled with boiled water. There was no bathing, no hair cutting, no cutting of finger or toe nails. Uncle Liu Duzhou said this is the way it was taught to him by his teacher, the 5th successor of Neiyang gong, and that was just the way it was—nothing could be changed.

Apart from eating, sleeping, and going to the toilet, Liu Guizhen was to practice Neiyang gong every other waking hour of the day! Central to this intense practice were breathing exercises. In addition there were various postures, and a lot of mantra chanting. If Liu Guizhen wanted to change or modify anything, his uncle told him, “You do only what you are told to do. Nothing else. Only what you are taught.” [http://qigong.arkoo.com]

After 102 days Liu regained his health (and thirty pounds). He returned to work. Surprised by his unexpected recovery, Communist officials wanted to know how this happened. Perhaps some answers might be found in the practices that healed Liu Guizhen which might help heal others. (After so many years of war China was in shambles. Many were sick or

injured, and there was only one western styled doctor for every 26,000 people. [Palmer p.33]) Liu's meager salary was increased by a bag of rice, and again he was sent home again, this time to learn more from his uncle. Eventually Uncle Liu Duzhou revealed the most important "secret" of *Neiyang gong* and how it benefited a person's health: By silently repeating a phrase while focusing mental awareness below the navel, brain activity was slowed and the inner organs were strengthened. Doing this improved mental and physical well-being which consequently prolonged life. [Takahashi, p. 50]. Liu Guizhen returned to his supervisors with that and other information gathered from his uncle.



Liu Guizhen sending qi to his temples

Note: The place below the navel was called the "*dantian*", meaning "cinnabar farm". This needs to be explained: Cinnabar (red mercuric sulfide crystals) although toxic and poisonous were ingested by the ancient Chinese in their search for immortality. So here "*dantian*" actually means, "*The place where long life is cultivated.*" Liu Guizhen usually located the *dantian* 1.5 *cun* (the width of two forefingers) below the navel at the acupuncture point CV-6, the *qihai*—"Sea of Qi." The difficulty here is the *dantian* is usually located below and **underneath** the navel, right in the center of the lower abdomen. To make matters more confusing, Liu Guizhen occasionally seems to reference the *dantian* **inside** the abdomen, and not **on** it. Nevertheless, wherever it is positioned, bringing the mind to either place apparently brings about positive results.

Liu Guizhen's assigned goal had been to "*Extract Chinese body cultivation techniques from their 'feudal' and religious settings, to standardize them and put them in the service of the construction of a secular modern state.*" Everyone agreed that to accomplish the goal, major changes were needed to be done with what he had just learned. It was doubtful that the masses would ever accept it in its original form. Therefore changes were made: the twelve hours of daily practice were reduced to approximately six hours. Breathing techniques, body postures and *Taijiquan* (tai chi) movements were sim-

plified. Spiritual mantras were changed into secular aphorisms. For example, the former Buddhist "*The Claw of the Golden Dragon Sitting in Meditation in the Chan Chamber*" became "*I Practice Sitting Meditation for Better Health.*" [Palmer p. 31]. Controlled breathing and concentration on the *dantian* remained central to the practice.

The Communist bosses were especially pleased in that the new techniques were simple and inexpensive—things that most people, whatever their health conditions, could somehow do most anywhere and most anytime without special equipment, drugs or medicines. What previously had been secretly passed down from master to student, now was almost ready to be institutionalized and controlled by governmental directives and propagated to the masses.

However, there was a serious problem: this "new" health system could not be called "*neiyang gong*"—that gave away its "pernicious" Buddhist ancestry. What was needed was a "scientific" term, a Maoist-Marxist ideological sounding term. Older Chinese words perhaps might be acceptable, but only if they could somehow be made to conform to a "mechanistic materialistic conceptual framework." Before being made public to the multitudes, it had to have a politically acceptable name.

### THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN WORD "QIGONG"

Huang Yueting, the Director of the Research Office of the Health Department of Southern Hebei, began discussions with Liu Guizhen. First they considered "Spiritual Therapy," then "Psychological Therapy," then "Incantation Therapy." After group discussions these terms were rejected.

[Liu Guizhen was a learned man who had suffered from tuberculosis, so I am assuming this happened next: Liu remembered a book, *Special Therapy for Tuberculosis: Qigong* published in 1936. The "*Qigong*" in that title meant "Breathing Exercises" and breath exercise was a basic tenet of Liu's modernized version of *Neiyang gong*.] What is certain is that "*Qigong*"

was proposed as the new name. After further discussions, on March 3, 1949 “Qigong” was proclaimed as the official name for the health exercises that Liu Guizhen and the group had developed. [Palmer 30-32].

(Note: Over many thousands of years *never* had “qigong” been used to describe the life preserving energy practices of breath-body-mind which today is called “Qigong.” Many other terms were used instead, most notably *dao-yin* meaning *leading and guiding*.)

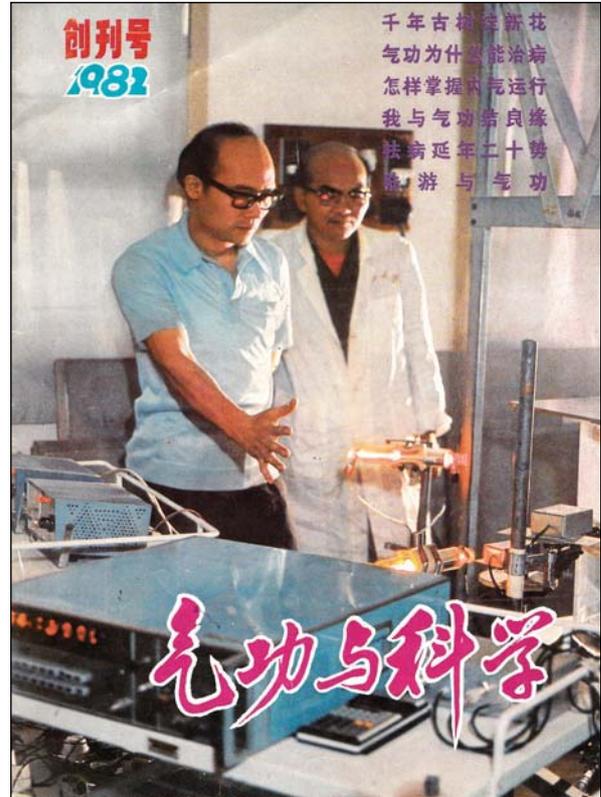
### THE POPULARIZATION AND GROWTH OF QIGONG

*“The methods elaborated by Liu Guizhen became the model of qigong organization and practice, and was reproduced in medical institutions throughout China.”* [Palmer p. 43]

All was not over with just the creation of a name, for outside of a handful of official health bureaucrats, no one had ever heard of this new “Qigong.” Because of his knowledge and experience, Liu Guizhen took on the role of leader, pace-setter, and standard bearer. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and for four years moved about Hebei province teaching and healing with his “Qigong.” [Palmer, pgs. 31, 34]. The results were impressive: the techniques promoted prevention and healing, especially from illnesses of the respiratory, digestive, and nervous systems. Also significant was the strengthening of the immune system, reduced hypertension, and improvements with



Liu Guizhen sending healing qi to a patient.

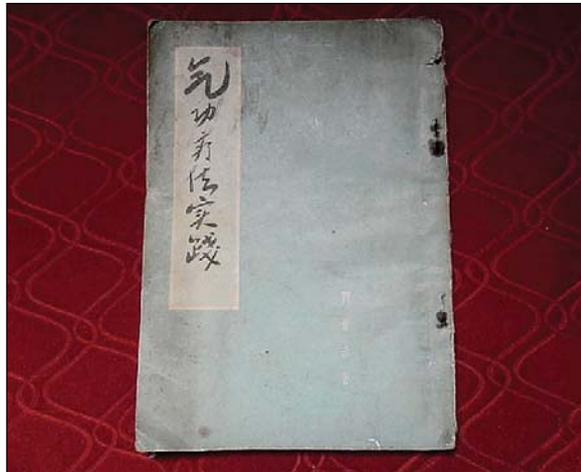


Liu Guizhen conducting a scientific experiment on the sending of external qi.

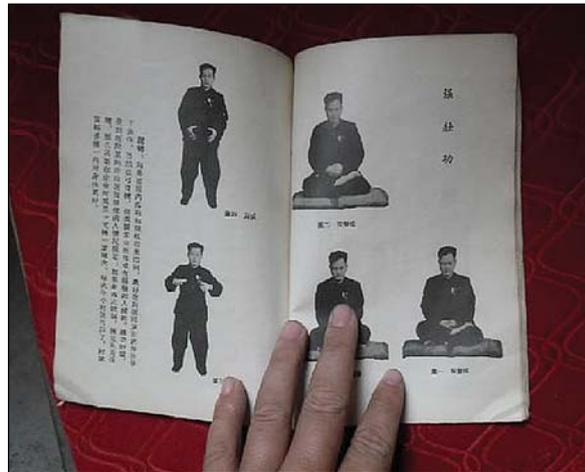
diabetes and heart conditions. (Liu Guizhen was reticent about using the techniques alone to cure cancer, but he believed they helped speed recovery after cancer treatments.) [Takahashi, p.50]

In 1954 he helped create the Tangshan Qigong Clinic, the first such institution in history, and became its Director. His uncle and teacher, Liu Duzhou, was put in charge of qigong coaching—(not for the former twelve-plus hours a day but now only [*sic.*] for seven hours a day). [Palmer 34]. According to the records, 365 patients (most suffering from ulcers and nervous disorders) were treated. 100% of the patients showed improvement and 95% were cured. [see “Qinhuangdao City...” listed in web sites at end of article.]

One year after the founding of the clinic, Liu Guizhen was sent to Beijing to demonstrate his healing qigong. Chairman Mao Zedong named Liu Guizhen an “Advanced Worker,” and during this same year (1955) he was summoned for more personal interviews with leading government officials.



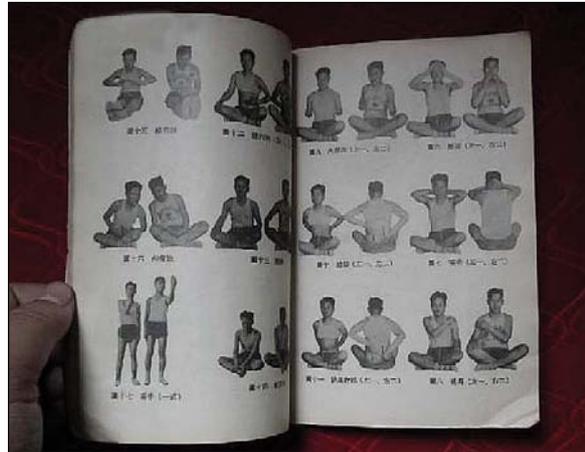
**Qigong Therapy Practice - cover**



**Qigong Therapy Practice – meditation postures**



**Qigong Therapy Practice - binding**



**Qigong Therapy Practice – movements and massages**

**This is an 1958 edition of Liu Guizhen's book. For the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution it was a prime target for finding and burning. Interestingly the cover and pages were bound so tightly that the book often refused to catch fire—(although it had “caught fire” ten years before to become a major vehicle to bring the modern practice of qigong to millions of people in China, and subsequently to the world.**

The Tangshan Clinic was too small, so in 1956 Liu Guizhen became vice-president, then President of the larger Beidaihe Qigong Sanatorium. Up until 1964, 3,000 patients were treated there including many high ranking members of the CCP; the Sanatorium also trained 700 workers. It was considered the most important qigong institution in China until 1965. [Palmer 36-37].

(Note: Another major figure in the history of Qigong during this time was Hu Yaozhen who in 1956 became the director of a qigong hospital in Beijing. (See <http://hunyuainstitute.com/huandhunyuan.pdf>). Hu Yaozhen is sometimes called “The Father of Modern Qigong.” Liu Guizhen is sometimes called “The Father of

Modern Medical Qigong.” Others instrumental in the popularization of qigong are Guo Lin, Chen Tao, Chengyu Lin, Duan Hui Xuan, Huang Yueting, Jiang Weiqiao, Lin Housheng, and Zhou Qianchuan.)

In September 1957, Liu Guizhen's *Qigong Therapy Practice* was published. It was the first book of its kind to appear in modern times, and quickly became the standard for the many subsequent books about qigong to appear in the next forty years. In 1982 an expanded edition appeared. The total of both editions printed was two million copies. Liu's book made “Qigong” a household word in China. [Palmer, p. 38].

Then all the successes of Qigong began to shatter. In 1964 the government controlled

press condemned Qigong as a thing that: “Promotes ‘superstitious’ concepts of tranquility and harmony which are completely contrary to our active physical training.” Qigong was called, “a rotten relic of feudalism” and the “rubbish of history.” “Those who practice qigong become monsters.” Finally the absurdly vicious, “Qigong is at the bottom of hell.”

(Note: In his book, *Qigong Fever* (p. 42), David Palmer suggests this sudden change in government policies was part of Chairman Mao’s aggressive campaign against Party leaders, many of whom were supporters, practitioners, and clients of qigong.)

Next, Liu Guizhen became a target of the attack. First, he was denounced as “The creator of the poisonous weed of qigong” and a “class enemy.” In 1965 he was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party, dismissed from Beidaihe Sanatorium, and incarcerated at the Shanhaiguan farm for political reeducation.

During the years of his imprisonment, under the threat of torture, even death, he continued to treat and teach qigong to his fellow prisoners. His wife pleaded with him to stop. But he refused, telling her: “The future will confirm [our work]. One day the science that we call ‘qigong’ will be known and judged as a precious legacy and treasure benefiting all humanity.” [see “Qinhuangdao City...” listed in web sites and end of article.]

In 1969 Liu’s comrades at the Tangshan Qigong Clinic were sent to clean public toilets. The Qigong Sanatorium in the city of Beidaihe was finally closed and its staff were ordered to condemn and denounce all their former work. [Palmer, p.43]. In 1976 with the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution the Beidaihe Qigong Sanatorium was reopened.

(Note: The paradox of the Beidaihe Sanatorium being open for three years during the devastating chaos of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) may be partially explained in that Chairman Mao Zedong along with many high-level cadres still wanted to utilize its resources for their own personal health. After Mao’s second wife Jiang Qing contracted uterine cancer, Mao indicated that Jiang should practice *Taijiquan* in Beidaihe. The incongruity between the formal party line and the actual pro-qigong beliefs of many its key leaders may be a partial



**Madam Liu Yafei, Liu Guizhen’s daughter and 7th successor of Neiyang gong, Vice Director of the Beidaihe Qigong Hospital.**

reason for the rapid revival of Qigong starting in 1978. [Kupfer, p.9]

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, 1980, Liu Guizhen once again became the Director at Beidaihe. But the long years of political abuse had taken their toll. He died in 1983 at the age of 63, much too early a death for a master of qigong.

After Lu Guizhen’s death his daughter Liu Yafei, continuing in the traditional ways, became the 7<sup>th</sup> successor of *Neiyang gong Qigong*, and was appointed Vice Director of the former Beidaihe Sanatorium, now called The National Medical Qigong Hospital and Training Center, or Beidaihe Qigong Hospital for short. Its curriculum expanded to include *Taijiquan*, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and even some western medicine. Liu Yafei remains a dynamic healer and teacher in 2013. [see <http://www.chinaqigong.net/english/2.htm> [and] <http://www.Neiyanggong.us/teachers.html> ].

Just as Liu Guizhen predicted during the dark days of his incarceration and persecutions, “One day the science that we call ‘qigong’ will be



**Liu Yafei teaching Neiyang gong to students from Japan.** known and judged as a precious legacy and treasure benefiting all humanity." Thanks to the work of Liu Guizhen many millions of people throughout the world now have a better, healthier and happier life.

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- "The History of Nei Yang Gong Qigong 内养功气功" <http://www.Neiyanggong.us/nei-yang-gong-history.html>
- "Nei Yang Gong and Tai Ji Quan" [at] <http://www.Neiyanggong.us/index.html> [This extensive site offers an outline-syllabus of the 21st century version of Liu Guizhen's qigong. There is information about the National Medical Qigong Hospital and Training Centre at Beidaihe, and a list teachers in China and the USA.]
- "Movements...Qigong de la Femme... par Madame Liu Ya Fei" [at] <http://mouvements.unblog.fr/2012/04/07/qi-gong-de-la-femme>.

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### Picture Sources

1. Liu Guizhen sending healing *qi* to a patient.
2. Liu Guizhen sending *qi* to his temples [ both from <http://www.yiquan78.org/historeqigong.htm> ].
3. Liu Guizhen conducting a scientific experiment on the sending of external qi. [cover of] 气功与科学 [Qigong and Science, premier edition], 1982.
4. *Qigong Therapy Practice* – cover.
5. *Qigong Therapy Practice* – binding.
6. *Qigong Therapy Practice* – meditation postures.
7. *Qigong Therapy Practice* – movements and massages. [All *Qigong Therapy Practice* pictures from [http://www.kongfz.cn/item\\_pic\\_9623364](http://www.kongfz.cn/item_pic_9623364) ].
8. Madam Liu Yafei, Liu Guizhen's daughter and 7<sup>th</sup> successor of *Neiyang gong*, Vice Director of the Beidaihe Qigong Hospital. [from] <http://web.com-hem.se/qigong>
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