

Changing Yin and Yang with Tai Chi

Tai Chi and Qi Gong are practiced through both leg and spine exercises to achieve a balance of inside Yin and outside Yang.

Generally it is understood that a healthy person is able to walk with ease and has a normally-curved and flexible spine. One Chinese idiom says (roughly translated): "Old age begins when the legs start to degrade." As the legs degrade, the ensuing physical imbalance will cause difficulty in walking.

Secondly, as the spine gradually loses its natural shape and becomes stiff, walking becomes far more difficult. Distortion of the natural shape of the spine is a manifestation of osteoporosis and easily leads to osteoporosis fractures. This is a common problem as humans age.

To forestall these problems, Tai Chi and Qi Gong exercises focus on building leg strength and spinal flexibility.

Students of Tai Chi slow-form and step back Qi Gong will be familiar with the effort and benefits of various exercises affecting the legs and spine. In particular: Bending knees and lowering the centre of gravity - "sinking down" - to make the leg muscles work harder; Shifting weight from one leg to the other, backwards and forwards from a brush knee position to further strengthen the legs; Sinking down while turning as in White Crane Cools Its Wings and so on.

For ideal benefits, imagine the head being suspended from the heavens by a silken thread, then "sinking down", sink the hips and coccyx to relax the spine.

During these exercises and other parts of the Tai Chi form, the feet and legs transition from Yin to become Yang (solid and stronger) and the upper body relaxes from Yang to become Yin (softer and more flexible).

In Step-Back Qi Gong especially, the backwards walking method focuses on the feet, leg and spinal movements. Relaxing the body, stretching and vertically twisting the upper body promote strength and flexibility and result in continual change of Yin and Yang.

Through repeated exercise, countless changes in the body's Yin and Yang result in the human body becoming stronger and much healthier.