MAIN DISCUSSION: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF QIGONG

Introduction

As discussed in the Literature Review, qigong is an intentional bodily practice encompassing activities of regulating the mind, the body, and the breath, and cultivating qi, which can be considered a metaphor historically developed through the practice of qigong. In this section the experiences of qigong practitioners will be phenomenologically described so that they can show an example of “physiological and organic knowledge of the body” based on the metaphor of “the body as a flow of qi.”

The practice of qigong has more than two thousand variations, and comprehensive descriptions of qigong experiences covering all of those variations are far beyond the ability of one researcher. Therefore, the fundamental aim of the current study is to provide practitioners and researchers of qigong with a starting point to conduct collaborative research through which we can contribute not only to the development of this field but also to the presentation of a unique example of human experience to the broader public. For this purpose, I will describe various dimensions of qigong experiences which emerge from my interviews with three qigong practitioners. First of all, as an introduction, some transformation of body images through qigong practices will be presented. Then, various dimensions of the experiences of qigong will be described in the following three categories:

1) Fundamental notions of the body and mind which are essential to understanding the uniqueness of qigong practice.

2) Some unique experiences emerging from particular styles of qigong.
3) Some issues relevant to the discrepancy between theory and experience in qigong practice which may shed some light on the aspects which were not presented in the literature of qigong.

Transformation of Body Images

The fundamental purpose of qigong is to experience the qi flowing body and systematically enhance such experiences. There are various dimensions of the qi flowing body, as described in the various literatures, and experiences described by the interviewees present some examples of those dimensions. In the beginning of this phenomenological description, I would like to present three examples of transformations of body image from the interview: first, the transformation of body images Mr. Z describes as three different types of feeling which he calls “qigong feeling;”; second, the transformation of body images Mr. T describes as "the different sense of realness" in his body; and finally, the transformation of body images Mr. C describes as "the world is experienced as moving with qi." The descriptions by these interviewees might be difficult to understand for those who have never practiced qigong. But it is important to stay with the sense of strangeness, wonder, or puzzlement in reading this first section, not to jump into an immediate understanding. After reading through all of the descriptions, you may come back to this section so that you can grasp how reading this phenomenological study may impact on your understanding of qigong.

Qigong Feeling

67 Here, as reviewed in p.50, body image has at least three different aspects: perceptual, mythical or scientific, and cognitive.
Mr. Z presents three different feelings developed through the practice of qigong; he states that these transformations happen no matter what qigong styles the practitioners do. The first one he describes as a peculiar sensation such as warmth, coldness, or numbness, moving along the meridians. They are often used as an index for the further development of the exercise. He describes it thus:

**Z:** In qigong feeling, you have a lot of different feelings, and different levels. In the beginning, mostly you just feel a body feeling, as I call it. Mostly it starts in the hands or feet or somewhere else in the body. It is very basic. Sometimes I feel very cold, hot, numb, or sometimes I feel energy moving... moving sometimes like a line, or like a channel, along a meridian. Sometimes my whole body feels like it is expanding or shrinking. All or part of your body disappears. No body. You don’t know where your neck is or where your hand is.... No feeling. You can’t see.... No feeling is feeling, body feeling. Basically, usually it happens in the beginning. Or sometimes, if the patients have some diseases or symptoms, like heart disease, or a little discomfort in the stomach, or lower back pain, during treatment or the qigong exercises, maybe they can feel more pain in that area.

In the practice of qigong, these peculiar bodily sensations are often understood as the function of “qi.” Following the above description, Mr. Z refers to his understanding of what makes this sensations happen: “Qi is going to that area to work for your disease or symptom. That’s why qigong can treat a patient and a disease, even when the patients do exercise by themselves.”

However, whether his understanding of “qi going to that area to work” is true or not is not a matter of concern at this moment. Rather, what seems more important is that consciously understanding those sensations as the function of qi may enhance these sensations further, and eventually help us experience “the qi flowing body.” That is, to understand the experience of “heat” in the palm as

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68 Nagahama and Maruyama (Yuasa, 1991) reported a meridian-sensitive person who could feel, upon the insertion of an acu-needle, the flow of sensation in a pattern which was the same as what are described as meridian lines (Yuasa, 1993).
“the state of qi flow” provides me with a sense of reality that qi exists and helps me take it as a clue to develop the metaphor of the “qi flowing body” in my experience.

In order to make clear the nature of this experience of “qigong feeling,” let me do an experiment following the injunction of Autogenic training. With the injunction, I may experience the heat in my hand. Although I perceive the change in my body brought to my mind as attention, which has some similarity to qigong, I interpret it as “the expansion of capillaries” rather than “the flow of qi.” The difference for me is that the experience of heat with the injunction of Autogenic training is taken as passive and static, while I sense the heat from qigong as more active and moving. It is hard to explain why this difference itself is induced from the cognitive categories of “qi” and “capillary,” but what I can do with the metaphor of “capillary” is to focus on the heat and get more of a sense of physical relaxation. On the other hand, with the metaphor of “qi,” I will be able to expand the sensation of heat in various directions with the knowledge that qi is able to move and flow, such as beyond the skin and the flow throughout the whole body.69

Secondly, in addition to these bodily feelings, Mr. Z mentions visual images and colors which accompany the practice of qigong.

Z: In the beginning later, or maybe it happens at the same time, you have some feelings in your mind or head, called a spirit feeling. Usually, in the beginning, somebody can feel light or color. Different colors. Or sometimes you can feel it in your forehead area. Or sometimes you feel, you can see some internal vision, in some parts of your body, lights or different colors...sometimes it’s a place where you go somewhere you have never been, or perhaps you have been. Like spirit travel...We don’t know. Just some kind of vision. Like dreaming or like a movie, you just see place: a city or countryside or mountain, or

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69 Tsumura (1990) warns that these peculiar sensations themselves are not something to be pursued. They can be a natural response of the body, but should not be too strongly focused; otherwise, we may have some side effects such as excessive fatigue, or hallucinations.
somewhere else, or flower. You don’t know where it is: “Oh, I have never been here.” Or sometimes, just emptiness, not only in the body but the mind, everything is gone. Just like sleep. Oh, it’s not sleep, because if somebody calls you, you just wake up. Or sometimes you just feel your body reduced to one light, a very bright light. No up, no down, no left, no side. You are just moving or floating in the universe. I think it is a higher level. Not every time can you have this kind of feeling. I call this the second stage of the body feeling, and spirit feeling.

This “spirit feeling,” as Mr. Z called it, contains various visual images which come “like dreaming.” It sounds like a dream, but it is important to make a clear distinction between the dreaming state and this kind of qigong state in that he claims, “Oh, it’s not sleep, because if somebody calls you, you just wake up.” In the qigong practice, even in a different state of consciousness, the practitioner is supposed to keep some connection with an ordinary sense of reality.

Thirdly, Mr. Z describes a non-ordinary sense of time, which he calls “a lost time feeling.” There are two different senses of time he mentions. One is to somehow know the future, which he attributes to much higher practices of Buddhism and Taoism rather than qigong. This seems to be a mixture of visual images and a transformation of the temporal sense. The other is to sense time duration differently from that indicated by objective clock time.

Z: But in the third stage, later, maybe, during the qigong meditation or some qigong exercises, you can have some feeling like you can know something that will happen later... messages just come. Maybe you know you will be in America next year. Before you come here, maybe you know, suddenly, from meditation, like it’s telling your future...one year later, two years later, for somebody maybe thirty years later, you know something will happen. Just like dreaming. Usually colored. Color, not black and white. Colorful. If it is colorful, usually it will come true... if not, if it’s in black and white, maybe it is not true. Even in meditation or dreaming, it is the same. But for different persons, different experiences....
But there is another feeling, mostly from the Buddhist and Taoist practices, which is not called *qigong*; it is much higher. In *qigong*, another feeling is what I call a lost time feeling. Time. Like in meditation, you think only fifteen minutes has passed, but by the clock, it has been about one hour or two hours. This time feeling is, in the treatment of patients, the same. You treat a patient, *qigong* treatment, for a long time, and he feels like he is asleep or in a deep meditation. When I say, “Oh, OK, treatment is over,” he says “Oh, too fast.” Then I ask him, “How long you have been here?” and he replies “Oh, fifteen minutes.” [But actually] sometimes it has been over an hour...He feels very slow. Maybe in this kind of time, everything is slow.

This kind of experience may provide us with a unique example of temporal consciousness, but in order for us to examine this kind of transformation of an internal time sense, we need a more precise description than Mr. Z’s clinical example provided here; as Varela (1999) points out, the mode of access to the experiences is essential for us to carry out such phenomenology of internal time-consciousness. However, at this moment, it would be sufficient to present such a possibility and leave it for further elaboration.

### Transformation from *Jitsu* to *Kyo*

Another interviewee, Mr. T, describes the transformation of his bodily images through *qigong* practices in a different way. In his description, he uses the terms *jitsu* and *kyo* to describe his experience of the transformation of body images. These terms are often used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to make a diagnosis of the state of the body (Ishida, 1992), but here Mr. T connotes these terms rather differently from a TCM usage, juxtaposing realness and void.
T: The closest experience I may have to that idea [RenjinHuaqi] is when I experience the transformation of my bodily senses, from *jitsu* to *kyo*. Describing it simply, when I [imagine] holding a ball like this and the ball becomes “matured,” the ball which is not there becomes *jitsu*; in sensing the movement of the ball, the ball is *jitsu* and this [pointing to his body] is *kyo*....It gives me a sense of freedom, not the sense that I am restricted by the skin, but the sense that the *qi* surrounding my body extends from and also enters into my body... I also have a sense of unification which comes from the disappearance of distance between things. These senses emerge when I transform *kyo* to *jitsu* and become *kyo* myself. So, this ball exists as *jitsu*, but what moves it is *kyo*... The point is not whether the *qi* ball between my palms exists or not, but that my bodily consciousness gets transformed through imagining the *qi* ball between my palms and concentrating my mind there...The experience of *kyo* is like a loss of boundary between my own body and the surrounding air. Just being there. Since it is movement from the center, I still have a sense of center. But the heaviness of the body which I usually sense when I stand up will completely disappear...My own presence seems to be grasped as rather a swirl than a weighted substance. I take that swirl as my own self...a movement freely coming in and out beyond the skin.

In this description, Mr. T first refers to his ordinary sense of body as “*jitsu*” and the space between his palms as “*kyo*.” His ordinary perception of his body gets transformed into that of the air. That is, he experiences his body in the same way as the air and the air between his palm is felt like his body. Mr. T describes the characteristics of this transformation: “The experience of *kyo* is like a loss of boundary between my own body and the surrounding air.” What is also important is his metaphor using “swirl” rather than “a weighted substance” to describe his sense of presence after this transformation. The “swirl” metaphor implies movement, and through this transformation from *jitsu* to *kyo*, he seems to experience movement beyond his skin’s boundary.

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70 The characteristic of imagination in qigong is discussed in the section of "Jing, Qi, and Shen". (p.160).
The Movement of the World

Mr. C presented his experience of the movement of the world during his practice of Taijiquan. In this experience, as he described, not only do the boundary between the world and himself seem to disappear, but also he becomes one with the movement of the world.

C: One day, right around Christmas time, before the evening session had started, it began to snow outside. I could see through the beautiful studio window that snow was coming down. In New England, in Massachusetts, in mountain regions, the snow is quite beautiful. There were many pine trees, like here. Snow is always very heavy. The branches were so spectacular that, as I was looking at the snow, I felt inspired. I thought it would be wonderful to do Taiji in the snow, outside. I had free time; there was nothing else happening. I put on my boots, and went outside away from the building, so I was just surrounded by nature. I had the sound of falling snow, and the sight and feeling of the snow. And I began to do my Taiji form.... I was up in the snow, outside doing Taiji, and I completely disappeared. I was not doing Taiji. It was the snow doing Taiji, the ground was doing Taiji, the air was doing Taiji, the trees were doing Taiji, and I was not there.... As soon as I began, the moment I began Taiji, all of a sudden...amazing. I was amazed later, at that time I was only in the experience.

Following this, he describes his experience by saying, “the world was doing the movement, and I was an expression of the energy of the world.” In this statement, he implies a very important characteristic of the metaphor of qi, which is the autonomy of the world, in which we are not only moved by that world but also moved as an expression of it. At the physical level, all objects, particles, or molecules are movements and energy, and we always receive the impact of such movements. However, when he describes his experience as “I was an expression,” this statement

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71 This sense of losing the bodily boundary is peculiar to the experience of qigong, and will be further examined in the next section.
seems to contain a totally different connotation from such physical levels. Again, at this moment, we need more experiential descriptions to elucidate deeper meanings of his experience of the movement of the world.\textsuperscript{72}

In this way, the interviewees present some examples of the transformation of bodily feelings, visual images, temporal senses, a sense of realness, and the boundary between the world and oneself, through the practice of \textit{qigong}. These experiences might provide a concrete example of what Weiss (1999) argues for in the concept of the power of corporeal transformation when she claims that “changing the body image, I maintain, must involve changes in the imaginary which situates the body image within a vast horizon of possible significance” (p.67). However, Weiss does not seem to go far enough in actually examining the corporeal foundation of this bodily transformation. For example, she emphasizes the imaginary in her discussion, but her view of the imaginary, which is based on that of Butler and Irigary, is rather Kantian and disembodied. Consequently, her discussion results in missing the essential characteristics of bodily transformation: tension between our intention to transform and the anonymous and habitual power of keeping the status quo. In order to avoid such a problem, the following descriptions of \textit{qigong} experiences will provide the reader not only with concrete examples of such “corporeal transformations” but also with the characteristics of body and mind to bring them about.

\textbf{Fundamental Notions in the Practice of Qigong}

In this section, fundamental notions of the body and mind, which are essential to understanding the uniqueness of \textit{qigong} practice, such as bodily boundary, imagination, intention,

\textsuperscript{72} Daoism and Confucianism have developed their study of nature and human ethics based on this kind of view that human beings are always in nature. Such a view originated in \textit{Yijing} (Yuasa, 1994).
visualization, relaxation, and the unconscious process of learning qigong, will be examined. 

Qigong originated in China, and was originally guided by Chinese language. However since it has been brought to other cultures, and such guidances have been translated into other languages, it would be crucial to make clear how the fundamental notions in such guidances are different from their common connotations.

Bodily Boundary

Experiences of Neither Inside nor Outside

We usually take the skin as the boundary of our body. That is, the space inside of the skin is my body, and outside is not. However, this kind of boundary I sense between inside and outside may be transformed in the practice of qigong. For example, in the interview, Mr. T and I reflect on the experiences of taking an outside hot tub together and looking over beautiful Mt. Misen where the clouds were hovering over the top of the mountain. He describes his state: “since we were taking a hot tub, we were already in a qigong state of body and mind, and therefore, I sensed that as far as my gaze reached it was my body.” What does “as far as my gaze reached, it was my body” mean? Does his body expand to include his surroundings up to the far top of the mountain? Obviously not. I was there next to him, enjoying myself steeping in the hot spring. I did not sense being incorporated into his body. Mr. T further describes his experience:

T: Somewhere in my body, the sense of accumulation, especially that of yin qi, was there. While clouds were floating towards Mt. Misen and accumulating there, a sense that some parts were moving and other parts are staying and overlapping one another was also condensing within myself. I felt that my condensed sensation might reach a certain peak and the clouds would open up.
For Mr. T, the movement of the clouds over Mt. Misen was sensed as the flow within. That is, he did not see the world around him as objects but sensed them as a part of his body; for him the world became like “MY” body. In this qigong state of body and mind he says that what is happening outside is also sensed as happening inside. In exploring this state, it is necessary for us to reexamine what is inside and outside our bodily experiences.

**The Sense of “MY” Body**

In my natural attitude towards my own body, I take it for granted that the skin separates the inner and the outer spaces of my body. My body is surrounded with my skin, and anything outside of my skin does not belong to my body; they are objects of my world. This seems to be obvious when I look at my hand holding a cup; that is, I see that “MY” hand holds a cup. However, once I examine what provides this sense of “MY,” I realize that this looking itself does not provide the sense that it is “MY” hand. In other words, a mere glance at my hand simply provides me with the shape and color of it, which is not totally different from my wife’s hand holding the same cup, except by a degree of familiarity. The color and shape of “MY” hand are more familiar than those of my wife’s hand, but that sense of familiarity itself is not the source of the sense of “MY,” because even when I close my eyes, I still sense that “MY” hand holds the cup. As Merleau-Ponty claims (1962), many people cannot pick up a photo of their own hand among many photos of others’ hands.

Now, let’s turn to the experience of holding a cup with my eyes closed. As Husserl (1989) describes, in my tactile sensation, I intuitively sense the difference between the cup and the hand. Softness, smoothness, and coldness are things I objectify as the characteristics of the cup. On the other hand, the sense of the position of my thumb, the angle between the thumb and the index finger, and the tension in my palm are, intuitively, I know, all within my body, that is, belonging to
me. This sense of “belonging to me” becomes clearer when I touch the cup with the other side of my same hand; the coldness, smoothness, and softness are now sensed on the other side of my hand, not on the side with which I had touched the cup first. By contrast, I still sense, though differently, the position of my thumb, and its relative angle to the index finger as “MY ”hand.

This intuitive sense of “MY” hand cannot be deduced from the experience of contact with the cup because I still have that sense even when I put my hand up in the air. The difference in both cases is that the boundary of “MY “hand becomes blurred when I put the hand in the air. Though it becomes blurred, however, this sense of “MY” hand in the air is more fundamental than tactile or visual sensations. The blur-ness of the boundary of my hand itself actually addresses this fundamental experience of “MY” body, which is supported by neither the visual nor the tactile boundary of the skin.

Then what does this “blurred” experience of “MY” hand belong to? Again, once I pay more careful attention to this sense of “MY” hand to find what it belongs to, I realize that this sense is all connected with my whole body without any boundary. This is what is described as “body schema.”73 He argues, “I am in undivided possession of it [my whole body] and I know where each of my limbs is through a body image [body schema] in which all are included” (P.98). What is important in this awareness based on body schema regarding the body's inner and outer boundary is that the spatiality of the schematic version of “MY” body is not determined by “a spatiality of position” in the physical space but by “a spatiality of situation.” Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) gives an illustration of this as:

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73 As pointed out by Gallagher (1986) and discussed in the literature review, the term "corporel schema,” which was translated as "body image“ in the English version of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), should be translated as body schema rather than body image.
If I stand holding my pipe in my closed hand, the position of my hand is not determined
discursively by the angle which it makes with my forearm, and my forearm with my upper
arm, and my upper arm with my trunk, and my trunk with the ground. I know indubitably
where my pipe is, and thereby I know where my hand and my body are… The word ‘here’
applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or
to external co-ordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the
active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks. (p.100)

This body schema exists as the background or “the zone of not being,” and, based on it, “bodily
space can be distinguished from external space and envelop its parts instead of spreading them
out” (p.100). In this way, between MY body and the world, or the separation of the inner and outer
spaces of my body, is not a matter of whether it is seen within the skin nor whether my tactile
sensation reports its belonging to me or not. Rather, it is determined by “body schema” which
itself is not reduced from the physical space but states that “my body is in the world.”

The Qigong State of No Boundary

In this way, the flow of a cloud was not seen as an object of Mr. T’s sight, but felt as a
sense of his body, a part of his body-in-the-world. He describes this state as “As far as my glance
reaches, I sense it as my body, or I see it with my bodily sense... I do not see it from outside as an
object.” Such experiences as the “outside” world within are described by Mr. T in the following
way:

T: Perhaps, the case of hearing the sound would be the same; if I hear something, I do not
hear it as an object... It is not such a way that the sound from outside may affect me... In
such a case, as we are affected, the outer unexpectedly intrudes into me; it does not matter
whether it may be consequently felt as comfortable or uncomfortable. In that case, it was
not something like that.... So, like doing meditation, when you do qigong, if any noise from
outside catches your attention, you are not in a qigong state of body and mind. You are supposed to feel that any noise can be felt as happening within.

In this way, Mr. T experienced the flow of clouds as happening within himself while in a qigong state of body and mind. Then, do these clouds become a part of his body, like arms or legs? In other words, do these clouds over Mt. Misen become incorporated into his body schema as a blind man’s stick or the keys of the typewriter Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) illustrates which also cease to be an object and are incorporated into one’s body schema? The contrast between the keys of a typewriter and the flow of clouds will render further understanding of the inner and outer experiences Mr. T describes as the qigong state of body and mind.

The keys of a typewriter are mere objects when I just flatly put my fingers on the keyboard. But once I put my body, especially fingers and arms, in a certain position, then those keys cease to be objects outside of my body and become a part of my body in engaging a certain project in the world, i.e., typing a letter. I am no more conscious of their positions in “objective” space and my fingers and the keys are no longer separated in my experience of typewriting. The keys are not pushed by my fingers but are dancing with my fingers to produce the words that appear. In terms of ceasing to be an object, the keys of the typewriter and the clouds are the same. However, while the keys become incorporated into my body schema, the clouds are not incorporated into Mr. T’s body schema but appear in his body image as something within his body.\(^\text{74}\) That is, unlike the keys of the typewriter, the flow of clouds does not disappear in Mr. T’s sensitivity, and the flow of clouds itself has its own movement; the clouds and Mr. T’s body do not actively engage in any project. In this sense, the clouds, unlike the keys of a typewriter, are not incorporated into his body.

\(^\text{74}\) In this case, the objects appear as a part of one’s body image, but not body schema. In the martial arts qigong, by contrast, there are cases in which a practitioner can affect other people from a distance (Yuasa, 1991).
schema, but appear as something "non-object" in his body image. That is, the flow of a cloud was not something he needed to appropriate but something in between objects and his body. Mr. T describes this state in the following way:

T: Of course, I am not saying that I can control the weather [heavenly qi] at will, because the cloud is moving with its own reason. I am not saying that I intentionally tried to clear up a certain spot in opposition to the natural movement of the cloud, but I felt that the cloud was clearing up as if food were being digested in my body.

As the food in the process of being digested is neither the object nor my body, the clouds are neither the object nor my body. Moreover, that "cloud" is not an object to control or appropriate by intention, but a process of the body’s being in the world. In this way, anecdotes of the experience of the objects outside of the body being within one’s body image in the qigong provides us with evidence of a condition in which the world ceases to be an object separated from the body, yet is still not incorporated into our body schema.75

Imagination: YiXiang76

In qigong practice, imagination plays an important role. Imagination in qigong is not a mere mental representation of something absent, but it is always associated with certain bodily sensations and their extensions. Edward Casey (2000) in his phenomenological exploration of imagination, points out the lack of depth in our imagination. He claims:

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75 Iris Young (1990), in her essay on the experience of pregnancy, describes a new conceptualization of the body. She presents the idea that “the integrity of my body is undermined in pregnancy not only by this externality of the inside, but also by the fact that the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux...pregnancy roots me to the earth, makes me conscious of the physicality of my body not as an object, but as the material weight that I am in movement” (pp.162-163). This description of transformation of body image in pregnancy contrasts with a qigong experience and may provide us with an opportunity to explore further the fertility and bodily experiences.
What we imagine, in contrast, discourages exploration by its very nature. This stems from the fact that the imaginative presentation, and thus its specific content, is given all at once to the imaginer. To be given all at once is to lack concealed, still-to-be-disclosed aspects and hence to render exploration superfluous… For what I imagine has an irreducible frontal character: it is always given as facing me (and I it) and as lacking that depth or three-dimensionality necessary for the exploration of full-bodied objects.

(p.91-93)

This lack of depth or three-dimensionality is not always true in the experience of imagination in the qigong practice. A three-foot qi ball is felt as three-dimensional. The characteristic of the qigong way of imagination, always associated with bodily sensations, may provide some alternative views towards our faculty of imagination.

Mr. T points this out when he responds to my question in which I ask him the difference between just imagining Mt. Misen and his experience of expanding his body image to include Mt. Misen.

M...then, what is the difference between just having an image of Mt. Misen and expanding your sense step by step, as you describe?

T: I think that what I mean is different from just having an imagination. Just imagining does not necessarily accompany a sense of your body. What that means is, in short, your mind can go anywhere but your body is just here and now. We call qi the middle of this mind straying around and the body being here and now. In order for qi to be firmly accompanied with the mind--if qi is totally accompanied with the mind, the abandoned body would become empty--the only way is to expand step by step like that. It is not something like flying away but rather like there is a ground and qi is expanding from the bottom of the ground like a concentric circle. That’s how I sense it.

Imagination is usually associated with Yinian (意念). But Mr. T points out that imagination is Yixiang (意想) rather than Yinian. Yinian has more to do with intention, and Yixiang is related to image.
In order for us to explore the nature of imagination in qigong practice, let me follow the direction Merleau-Ponty (1962) indicates in his discussion of imagination. Merleau-Ponty points out:

To perceive oneself as imagining is to set up a certain kind of relation with the absent thing... When the object is totally absent without a representative, I make use of certain elements in my present perception which are analogous. To imagine is always to make something absent appear in the present, to give a magical quasi-presence to an object that is not there. On this basis one may then investigate how the subject achieves this incarnation of an absent visage in the present data of his perceptions. One will see that he must impress them with a physiognomy or a structure of some kind that he then projects actively by his motor-affective attitude. (p.60)

Following Merleau-Ponty’s suggestion to “investigate how the subject achieves this incarnation of an absent visage in the present data of his perceptions,” let me compare imagining holding a qi ball with holding a soccer ball. In my imagination of holding a qi ball between my palms, especially in the beginning stage of practice, nothing is felt as present in that space between my palms. That is, compared with actually holding a soccer ball, which gives me a sense of heaviness and smoothness, imagining holding a qi ball between my palms may not give me any substantial sensations. However, imagining a qi ball is also different from just the mental imagination of holding a soccer ball. The difference is in how the imagination associates with my

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77 To make clearer the difference between something present and one’s mental imagination, an experiment of actually holding a balloon and imagining holding a balloon might be helpful. To hold a balloon, my arms, head, and upper body coordinate in engaging with the balloon, and my hands are put on both sides of the balloon. These motions of my body are not segmented nor is my intention intruding into each motion; that is, I do not have to calculate how I move various parts of my body nor how much pressure I need to exert from my hands onto the balloon to keep holding it. Rather, the movements of my body are in totality with my intention to hold it. Moreover, when I hold a balloon, my intention to hold it hides in the background, not in my awareness; that is, body schema allows me to do it. I am only aware of sensations in my hands, or my posture. By contrast, when I imagine holding a balloon, I just make up a mental image of a balloon, and remember the texture of it and the body posture necessary to hold it. These are all mental activities involving a clear intention to hold a balloon and do not necessarily employ bodily sensations.
bodily sensations. In the mental image of holding a soccer ball, the objects of my intentionality are my mental representation of a ball and my body holding it, both of which I sense as my internal mental realm. In this way of imagination, my bodily sensation is outside of my intentionality and I do not have any connection between the representation of a soccer ball and my body holding it, and my present bodily sensations. Therefore, I can imagine myself holding a soccer ball anywhere, whether at the top of Mt. Everest or in my backyard. It is all about my conceptual body image. This is what Mr. T means by “Just imagining does not necessarily accompany a sense of your body. What that means is, in short, that your mind can go anywhere but your body is just here and now.”

The key point is in imagining with a certain body posture, which allows us to stay in a certain body schema. When I imagine a qi ball in qigong practice, I first form a certain posture, usually relaxing the whole body and keeping my palms and arms in a certain shape. Then, I pay attention to that posture and the space between my palms, both of which are the objects of my intentionality. In imagining a qi ball between my palms with a certain posture, I initially do not feel any sensations in my palm. Since there is no actual ball there, different parts of my body, the angle my arms make, and the tension in my palms and finger may not be well coordinated. After continuing this manner of imagining a qi ball with a certain posture for a certain period of time, however, sensations such as tingling, warmth, or pressure may be felt. Sometimes, my palms are pulling and pushing each other without my intention, as if the “qi ball” between my palms is bouncing by itself. Once my imagination of holding a qi ball associates with these bodily sensations, which are usually called qi gan, the sign of felt qi, I feel my imaginary qi ball as present. Mr. T describes this:

T: Simply saying, for instance, when I imagine holding a ball like this (with a posture of holding a ball between the palms), once this ball gets matured, it turns
out to be real. The sensation that the ball is moving gives me a sense that the ball is real and my body is depleted.

Then, what does it mean by Mr. T’s claim that “in order for qi to be firmly accompanied with the mind...the only way is to expand step by step”? To consider this, let me explore imagining a qi ball three feet away, not between my palms. If I just imagine a qi ball three feet away without having a connection with my bodily sensation, the difference between a qi ball between my palms with its accompanying posture and a qi ball three feet away might be similar to the difference between holding a balloon and imagining holding it. That is, the former associates some sensations in the palms and other parts of the body, while the latter does not always bring those up. However, if I stay with those sensations of tingling, warmth, pulling or pushing, and pressure, AND imagine extending the qi ball to three feet away, then that ball three feet away can be connected with my bodily sensations and felt as present.

Therefore, imagination in qigong practice has certain limitations; that is, the imagination cannot be freely expanded but should be always connected with the center, our body. To keep that connection, the imagination needs to stay with our bodily sensations and can only gradually be expanded with them. This is what Mr. T implies when he says, “In order for qi to be firmly accompanied with the mind...the only way is to expand step by step like that.” In this way, imagining in qigong is not a mere mental representation of something absent, but it is always associated with certain bodily sensations. Therefore, the imagination cannot be freely expandable as mental imagination can, and it can only be expandable from the center, our bodies.
Intention: Yinian

In the practice of qigong, yi plays an important role. Yi is usually translated as consciousness, thinking, or volition, but it is equivalent to none of these. In qigong practice, especially in the beginning stages of practice, yi is used to guide qi, and that guidance is associated with bodily sensations, breathing and visual images. Therefore, yi is often regarded as equivalent to being aware of sensations or breath or images. However, this way of conceiving of yi becomes problematic for understanding the advanced state in which qi moves yi rather than yi moving qi.

To consider the complicated nature of yi and qi, I would like to examine the different descriptions of yi in the interviews with Mr. C and Mr. T.

Mr. C describes his experience in which his ordinary way of using yi to do Taiji was dramatically overthrown.

C: I began to do my Taiji form... I was up in the snow, outside doing Taiji, and I completely disappeared. I was not doing Taiji. It was the snow doing Taiji, the ground was doing Taiji, the air was doing Taiji, the trees were doing Taiji, and I was not there.... As soon as I began, the moment I began Taiji, all of a sudden...amazing. I was amazed later, at that time I was only in the experience. But, you know, it was an amazing experience because...I expected, somewhere inside of my mind, somewhere in my mind, I expected to replicate my usual experience in qigong, which is that I am doing the movements. You see, it is an active role, a volition. There is always a talk in qigong about yongyi (用意), using your yi to direct qi. So, I had believed that. That idea was perhaps interference in the deeper level of understanding qigong, because it is not the mind directing the qi. Qi is just flowing… If qi and yi are equivalent, or you can say if qi is consciousness, then consciousness, I think, prevails in not only the body but prevails in the universe. So, instead of doing qigong according to my earlier pattern, which was movements arising from within and expressing

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78 In Chinese, Yi is 意, and Yinian is 意念. As discussed in the literature review, Yi is a general word for “idea” or “thought” in Chinese, but in the practice of qigong, we use Yi with a much broader connotation,
themselves on the outside, I realized the opposite side of the story, which was the world was doing the movements, and I was an expression of the energy of the world. I was an expression of that. My movements were not an expression of what is always happening inside, but I was an expression of the energy of nature...So, I consider that experience to be a kind of reverse in qigong and Taiji.

In this description, Mr. C claims that “the world was doing the movements, and I was an expression of the energy of the world.” To understand this claim, the key point is in his statement, “I expected to replicate my usual experience in qigong, which is that I am doing the movements…it is not the mind directing the qi. Qi is just flowing.” Here he expresses the fundamental differences in his movement, that is, “Qi is just flowing” rather than “I am doing the movement.” In order to explore this difference, let me examine his idea of yongyi, “using your yi to direct qi.”

Usually in the practice of qigong, especially in the beginning stage where people have not developed the sense of qi, then bodily sensations, breath, or visual images may be used to guide the qi sense. For example, my description regarding how to use yi during the interview with Mr. C illustrates the latter method of using yi:

M: When I draw qi, in my premature stage, I use the sensation of my body as a direction. Like when I send my qi through the spine, a kind of sensing, small tingling, is moving...
C: Yes, yes.
M: That kind of stuff, I use as a direction of yi. How do you do it?
C: Yes, the same, or sometimes, I do it with the breath. You can do it with a sensation like tingling, you can do with the breath, just inhaling and imaging that the breath is going to that part of the body, or you can do it even just with yi. You can especially use...you just use yi. You can absorb qi from an external source. Let’s say, a mountain. You absorb, you just mentally draw the energy, kind of borrowing some of the life energy from the mountain.

including intending, paying attention, guiding our attention, and imaging.
You bring it into your heart, or liver, or stomach, wherever it’s required, you bring it from the sun.

M: So, in that process, my intention is over there in the mountain.

C: Yes, intention makes the link, in fact.

M: Right, linking, that kind of linking is coming close to me, and coming into my body from my mouth, and to a certain part of my body. So, that is the kind of process you are mentioning?

C: That’s right.

In this way of using yi as I described to Mr. C, we first pay attention to the sensations, like tingling, and then shift our awareness with that sensation along the body. For example, I first sense a tingling at the tip of my fingers, and then intentionally move that sensation up to the arms, neck and head. I even imagine that sensation over my head and imagine moving it in a circular way, back to my body from the soles of my feet. In this way of using yi, I am becoming aware of sensation, intending to guide it, and imagining its motion outside of the body; that is, yi contains all these aspects of consciousness. This way of using yi might be the basic way Mr. C confirmed in the interview.

However, even in his reply to my question, he actually claims a different way of using yi, that is, “you can even just do it with yi. You can especially use...you just use yi” In this way of using yi, Mr. C talks about not the way of using yi guided by sensations or breath, but about the way of using yi without being guided by anything. 

He further describes this way of using yi:

C: I think qigong has an extensive literature on the use of visualization, training the yi. And the visualization practices are in my opinion ultimately the ways of opening a realm of awareness. Once the realm is open, visualization is still helpful but is not required. For example, it’s possible to imagine the sun and the moon are joining and creating a bright
white pearl in the third eye. And when you look inside, that pearl becomes like a broad-beam flashlight that is shining light inside of the body. So you join the energy of the sun and moon, they create a luminous white pearl. When you close your eyes, and open the inside of the body, and then look into each organ, you see if any of them are ill. That is a powerful technique, but eventually the student can either get used to the technique or once that type of awareness is trained, they can just go inside and look. They don’t even need to imagine the pearl first. They just go inside and look.

Here, what Mr. C implies by saying, “They don’t even need to imagine the pearl first. They just go inside and look” is that once we get used to a certain state through guiding out visualization, we do not have to follow those visualizations step by step to reach that state. This is what Mr. C tried to claim when he stated, “or you can even just do it with yi. You can especially use...you just use yi” in response to my description of guiding yi with sensations. Mr. C further described this way of using yi:

C: Ultimately, what we want is an ability to direct the mind wherever it is needed. You can do that with visualization, or eventually you do it without visualization. Visualization is designed to open the awareness, at which point you may use the visualization or not. This use of yi without any guidance of sensations, breathing, or visualization, is a different way of using yi than what I have described in the interview with Mr. C; I should say that it is a beginner’s stage. This is why we say “When the intent (yi) arrives, the qi arrives.”

To further examine this state, I would like to refer to what Yamabe (1994) discusses in terms of yi. To keep yi in a certain place such as dantian (丹田) is called yishou (意守), and is understood as influencing the body by way of yi through visual images or emotions and cognition perceived by other senses. However, Yamabe (1994) proposes a way of using yishou not by

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79 The difference between moving with the guidance of sensation or images and moving spontaneously by putting the body in a certain state could be further explored by comparing other forms of movement, i.e., Authentic Movement, Contact Improvisation, Katsugen Undo, and Butoh.
making a conscious endeavor to be aware of certain parts of the body, but rather by putting the body in a certain state, by adjusting posture and movement, so that that part can be paid attention to. For example, according to Yamabe, *yishou dantian* means not to be merely conscious of *dantian*, but to slightly draw in the lower abdomen so that that part around the inside of the lower abdomen is kept as separate from other parts of the body. In this way of using *yi*, the emphasis is not on being directly aware of certain parts of the body nor image but on putting the body in a certain state, in which either awareness or image can be allowed to emerge. This way, once a certain bodily state is established, *yi* does not have to work to create that state. In the interview with Mr. T, he also describes this way of using *yi* passively as creating a container.

M: How do you use *yinian* in that case? When you have the consciousness to do something with *yinian*, then you may still keep the center inside of you. For example, when you do the *Wuji* Style, how do you use *yinian* [not to keep the center]?
T: By just keeping a sense of being a cylinder.
M: Rather than doing something, I just make myself something to move through.
T: Like being a container.
M: Making myself a container, and there, not using *yinian* as moving *qi*.
T: Not at all.
M: Ok, I got it.
T: In *qigong*, sometimes we intend to move *qi*, but what is more important than that is to create the environment, the bodily environment, where *qi* can move by itself. If you understand *QichenDantian* (*気沈丹田*) as sinking *qi* into *Dantian*, it is a superficial way of understanding it. That is, what is meant by “*qi* sinks into *Dantian*” is one is creating such an internal (bodily) environment. Therefore, well...*QichenDantian* means to create an outer container in which the body may want to be in that state naturally, or the *qi* becomes that state by itself. *QichenDantian*, intentionally moving *qi*, is a very superficial way.
This way of using yi in order to put the body in a certain state where qi can naturally move by itself is different from the use of yi to be guided with sensations or visual images, or even different from just following the awareness emerging from such uses of yi. The latter is working with one’s body image, while the former is working with body schema. According to Gallagher (1986), body schema “is an anonymous performance.” and “does not have to be made the object of consciousness in order to do its work.” Moreover, its very characteristic is “not something entirely in-itself; through its posturing the body defines its environment just to the extent that the environment defines the body’s postural standards.” This state of body schema seems to allow what Mr. C describes when he says “the world was doing the movements, and I was an expression of the energy of the world.” since “the body in its body schema, most genuinely lives as a body-environment” (Gallagher, 1986).

This access to the realm of body schema through continuous dialogue between body image and body schema is described by Mr. T in the following way:

T: Well, at the beginning, the body becomes...there is a term “Yi guides qi” which means when you use some image to visualize a state, then qi will move with that image. For example, if you imagine that qi comes to your palm, qi actually moves and your palm may turn red. The way Autogenic training is conducted is mostly like this: “yi guides qi.” But this is very superficial, and is just the first stage, in my view. After experiencing it many times, I became more concerned with the part of qi which cannot be guided by such yi. Most qi which works for the body cannot be moved with such yi; for instance, we cannot move our heart beat...Therefore, the parts we can change are very superficial ones, though I can change my states of mind with the guidance of yi. But its impact is not so big. So, it is nonsense to think that one who reaches to just such a stage regards oneself as an expert of qigong. There is a very long process in which “Yi and qi get together(意気相随)”, which means consciousness gets combined with qi and qi gets combined with consciousness.
There are certain parts which can be changed with this process, but many are not. Still, if I stay with it and observe those unchanged parts, I can gradually come to realize that the inside of the body is an incredibly huge environment. Not like the way I used to understand: I thought I could easily change myself with a slight endeavor of my intellect, but there are few parts in my body which a man can be aware of. If I am asked how I should get along with my coloform bacteria, I can’t answer that; the censor cells in the intestine may determine that of its own accord. The same with bile, or pancreatic juice. Thus, most things happening in our body are out of the reach of our consciousness. Even the functions of the red blood cells or white blood cells are beyond our consciousness. So, once we become aware of such things one by one, our consciousness moves, along with them.

Thus, yi plays an important role in qigong practice, especially in the beginning stages of practice, to guide qi by being associated with bodily sensations, breathing and visual images.

However, as the practice is developed, these associations will be put away, and thus it is emphasized that yi is accompanied by qi and qi is accompanied by yi. In this developed stage, a continuous dialogue emerges between body image and body schema, in which body schema will allow the practitioner access to realms of qi which are not open to us in our ordinary state.

**Visualization**

As mentioned in the section on Yinian, in the practice of qigong, breathing, bodily sensations, and visualization are used to train yi and guide qi. The purpose of using these methods is no more than opening awareness and training yi. Once we fulfill the purpose, we don’t have to stick to these methods. Mr. C describes this point in the following way:

C: This is made very clear in some of the Taoist alchemical writings where they say that at first you should use your breath to coordinate the motion of qi through the microcosmic orbit. So, you inhale up the back, and you imagine it coming down, to the upper palate, and you exhale from the tip of the tongue, down, inhale up, exhale down. So, the breath is being
used to direct the awareness. Later, you can let go of the breath, and you just send yi. You just mentally continue around and around. So, one is used to help the other. In other words, breathing techniques, and physiological methods, just like visualization, are used to open up a realm of experience which you can then just do yourself because you understand it, and feel it...Some people do the microcosmic orbit with the mudras. So, they lift here and they open the middle back, and bring the qi up here, and drop down in the front. But again, once the experience is clear, you just do it; you don’t need all the paraphernalia.

Mr. C also describes several examples of such visualization techniques in qigong:

C: For example, it’s possible to imagine the sun and moon are joining and creating a bright white pearl in the third eye. And when you look inside, that pearl becomes like a broad-beam flashlight that is shining light inside of the body. So when you join the energy of the sun and moon, they create an illuminated white pearl. When you close your eyes, and open to the inside of the body, and then look into each organ, you see if any of them are ill. That is a powerful technique, but eventually the student can either use the technique, or once that type of awareness is trained, they can just go inside... They don’t even need to imagine the pearl first. They just go inside and look....Or another example, you imagine that you are standing within your Dantian (丹田), and purple light from the three Dantian flows down, and fills the lower Dantian. Then, with the wheel of fire up here under your feet you can just spin. Wheels of fire take you up within your own body. You become a projected self, your small self, which is called Yinxing(陰形), the Shadow Form. The wheel of fire is spinning, and surrounded by purple qi, Ziqi (紫気). You rise up within your own body, and then, exiting from Baihui (百会), travel to the Big Dipper. There you meet the stars, the gods, of the Big Dipper. You petition them to change something that has been going wrong in your life. That is a wonderful, enjoyable, qigong meditation. But once you are familiar with it, then you have a choice. You can do the visualization, or you can just immediately travel, send a spirit out. You don’t need all of the wheel of light and purple qi and everything else, you just go...It is a training to open your mind to a realm of awareness and experience.
C: So, another example, let’s take someone who has cirrhosis of the liver. Then they can inhale green light into the liver, and exhale poisons; inhale green light and exhale poisons. But if they are advanced in qigong, they can just bring qi into the liver, they don’t even need the light for the image. Just draw qi into the liver. Or someone who has heart disease, let’s say a defective valve in the heart. So, they might inhale red light into the heart, imagine it filling the heart muscle and going into the heart valve, and exhale poisons through the mouth. But if they really have that feeling, they know how to direct the mind, and then they can do without that, they just mentally feel wherever the heart valve is that’s not working. Feel with the mind and just draw qi to that.

C: Yes, I visualize it... But it’s easy to sense it once you visualize it. And it has a healing effect. I think the healing effect is significantly stronger than it would be if you imagined yellow light. Or if one faces south, instead of north. I think that association has been validated in Chinese medicine. It really does work. And those are certainly other realms of experiencing in qigong, what Needham called the system of correspondences. As you know, that’s the basis of so many qigong meditations. You could even draw the energy of the stars to feed the organs. So, that’s another level of correspondence; someone might imagine Mercury bringing energy. You draw energy from Mercury into the kidneys, or you draw energy from Mars into the heart, or from Venus into the lungs, Saturn into the spleen, Jupiter into the liver. So, that’s another way of sensing the connection between the inside and outside.

Mr. C describes various ways of visualization in qigong practice; however, he also points out that visualization itself is not the goal of qigong nor the important tool in the later stage. He claims: “Qigong has an extensive literature on the use of visualization to train yi. And the visualization practices are, in my opinion, ultimately ways of opening a realm of awareness. Once the realm is open, the visualization is still helpful, but is not required.” An example of such a case in which the realm is opened and images spontaneously come up is presented by Mr. T. In his experience, he had a vision of being in his own body. At this time, he was doing rather simple qigong, Zhangzhuanggong, without having any image guidance.
T: Actually you count the name of the gods up to thirty-six thousand. It is a really hard practice, and it is like an internal anatomy, dissecting from within. It is nonsense just to read about it through books, and you should train your awareness to bring it to the tip of the toes. By actually doing that training, you may realize what it means. So, I don’t know how much we can do this, but the heart and the liver seem to be a good starting point. Surely you may have some experiences, sometimes as certain visual images. This can be just an illusion, but I see myself standing on the banks of one of my own blood vessel which seems like a river. I also hear the sounds, which I notice as my heart beat. Or when I do a breathing practice, I sometimes experience it as if I am in the lungs. I notice myself standing on a steep mountain, which is, I realize, an alveolus, and I feel blown by the wind there.

Thus, visualization, as well as breathing and physical sensations, is used to train yi and open up the realm of awareness. But in qigong practice, once you are familiar with such a realm, those techniques are not always used. Actually, as described in the section titled "Intention: Yinian" these techniques, and even the use of yi, are sometimes problematic in deepening the experience of qi and are not necessarily used in the practice.

Relaxation
In qigong practice, relaxation, *fangSong* (放松), is the most important element.\(^{80}\) Although the word relaxation in English usually connotes the release of tension, *fangSong* in qigong practice is not just a release of tension.\(^{81}\) Cohen (1997) describes this state of relaxation in qigong in the following way:

The Chinese word *Song* has very different connotations from the equivalent English word, “relaxation.” When we say “relax” in English, we often mean eliminating all tension, becoming almost limp. *Song*, however, implies greater aliveness. As my teacher, Charlotte Selver, used to say, “A flower is relaxed.” *Song* is not merely the absence of tension, but rather the absence of unnecessary tension. *Song* is the art of becoming aware of and inhibiting the habitual contraction of muscles due to emotional stresses and poor posture, breathing, and movement. (p.97)

In the interview, Mr. T also mentions this difference between just eliminating tension and *fangSong* in qigong. He refers to the difference between *huan* (緩) and *xie* (懈) in Chinese terms:

T: Well, according to the Chinese characters, the difference is expressed by that of *huan* (緩) and *xie* (懈)...Relaxation is *huan*, not *xie*, which means limp. I mean that the tense state is a state in which a certain aliveness is kept and is different from the stiff state. As I mentioned before, since it is often taken that good posture must be painful, we often become slovenly when we want to be comfortable... Such a limp state gives only a shallow comfort because it is not from within the body. That is, it is a reaction to the state in which we have tried hard to keep a good posture and have been forced to get tense....What is important is that you can have a dialogue with your sense of center regarding how you can really get relaxed.

\(^{80}\) In the modern practice of qigong, this emphasis on *fangsong* starts from the Shanghai qigong clinic where they examined the failure cases treated by Jiang Weiqiao (Ma, 1990). Based on their research, *fangsong gong* (放松功) was invented. In *fangsong gong*, the practitioners “focus on the various parts of the body sequentially and rhythmically, recite the word “Song (松),” gradually relax the muscles and bones, regulate the whole body into a natural, light, and comfortable state, unravel the tense state of body and mind, and take a balanced state between tension and relaxation” (Ma, 1990).
Examining the experiences we had in taking a hot tub, Mr. T emphasizes that the aim of getting into a relaxed state in *qigong* is not just having a temporary “disarmament” from the tense state, but rather cultivating a reorganization of it the tense state. He describes it further:

T: One factor [of getting relaxed in the hot tub] is the support from the water, which releases us from gravity. We need considerable practice to enjoy ourselves in the air as if we were in the specific gravity of water. To be in the water is the easiest way to get into the state of releasing any extra tension. Besides, the temperature may also help us create a state of relaxation. I often mention that the practice of *qigong* is as if we are in the water, and one person actually has practiced in an irrigation tank. It might be a good experience once, but if we continuously do it, it cannot be a practice. *Qigong* is supposed to put us in the same state as having the support of water even if we are in the air. Therefore, taking a hot tub cannot be a substitute for *qigong*.

In order to attain this relaxed state, several points are emphasized. Mr. C mentions the importance of breathing and posture for relaxation.82

C: For instance, it’s a universal experience that with a breath you become more relaxed and effortless, that it is easier to develop that core experience of being and presence, being without limitation, what you call *Wuji* (無極)... So, breathing is one method that you can bring to that. Correct posture is another one, because when the posture is correct, using the principles of *qigong* posture of bent knees, joints relaxed, lengthened spine, crown suspended, all of those different things, including belly breathing; then it is easier for the mind to become calm.

Mr. T also points out that the word “*fangSong*” itself has a particular function to make the practitioners relax. He states that “chanting the word ‘*fangSong*’ itself is used to relax the joints

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81 Some schools of Somatics also emphasize this kind of relaxation. For example, Gerda Alexander (1995) examines the state of tension of muscles, called tonus, and develops a training method for changing it.

82 Various ways to get relaxed, *fangsong*, are described in much *qigong* literature. For example, Chapter Eight of *The Way of Qigong* (Cohen, 1997) describes various attributes of relaxation.
by vibrating with the sound of ‘ng.’ In addition, for Chinese people, the pictorial image of ‘Song (松)’ is used to make a kind of autosuggestion.”

Finally, Mr. T emphasizes the importance of getting back to the “tense states” from the relaxed state. That is, even when we get relaxed in qigong practice, we need to somehow return to a certain tense state in our daily lives. However, if we just go back to the same tense state, he claims, it will be a big waste. In order to absorb the relaxed state of qigong, we need to spend more time experiencing the shift. Mr. T describes it as follows:

T: But if you merely disarm yourself, you just return to the original tense state when your body gets cooled down. What is significant is how we can return to the more desirable tense state from such a disarmed state. Therefore, taking a hot tub in the way that you return to the original state is not good. You may feel comfortable in a limp state for a while, but you must have some reorganization of yourself when you get out...So, it would be more desirable to sit down and do qigong in the tub, and take time to get out. This is also significant in the practice of qigong. For example, if you practice qigong for thirty minutes, the real effect will come up about an hour later. So, if you start working immediately after qigong, you will waste its benefits.

**The Unconscious Process of Learning Qigong**

In learning qigong, we usually imitate the posture or movement of the teacher. Qigong has been transmitted from generation to generation in China that way. Many modern books on qigong describe the various ways to practice qigong though they all claim that it is important to learn qigong not only through reading books. One of the reasons that it is hard to learn through books is that the process of learning a bodily practice should contain the aspect of body schema, which
might not always come up in our consciousness. The following story of Mr. C’s student will illustrate this issue of the unconscious process in learning:83

C: A psychiatric nurse began to study Taiji; I think that I told this story in my book. This was a big transformational experience for me, not only for the psychiatric nurse. The nurse was studying with me, and he had terrible difficulties. He just could not get the movement. He was very dyslexic. When I would tell him 'shift your weight to your right', he would shift to the left, and if I told him 'Move the left arm from the side', he might put the right arm down. Really, he did not have a sense of the body. And yet, in everyday life he appeared quite normal. I could not get a handle on what was wrong exactly. We tried doing Taiji. He was studying privately with me, studying Taiji. We tried to do exercises, and he just could not get it. He might do one movement, and that would be it. He could not figure it out. I was trying to find a way to get to him, a way to get him in touch with what he needed to learn. Finally we gave up doing Taiji, because it was just impossible.

He came to the class, and I did Taiji form for him. I would let him observe it. My sense was that perhaps he could catch some of the flavor, catch some of the feeling, even if he couldn’t do it. I’ve read stories of people who got cured by observing qigong or observing Taiji without even practicing it for themselves. So, I thought perhaps this would help. So, I spent ten minutes doing Taiji form. Then after that, it was very spontaneous, whatever seemed appropriate to the day, to his mood. Some days, we just talked and I counseled him, other classes consisted of different kinds of gentle stretching exercises. Sometimes, I read Haiku poetry and we talked about nature and we just figured out ways to become more sensitive to nature. Every class was different because the goal was just to help him get in touch with himself. If qigong was not going to do it, or Taiji was not going to do it, then we would find some other methods that would work because the goal was not Taiji. Taiji was a ladder and the object was for him to get in touch with himself.

One day, after a few months of this, during which he was still not practicing Taiji, but instead, he was only observing or we were doing other things, I had an inspiration. I got boxing gloves, and I told him to put on the boxing gloves and I said ‘we are going to play a

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83 This quotation is rather long because not only the event but also the context is important.
game. So, try to hit me.' First he said, 'I can’t do that. You are my teacher.' I told him,
'Don’t worry, this is a martial art. It’s a part of Taiji training. It’s fun. As you get more
coordinated and balanced and more aware, you will be able to hit me more easily. It’s going
to improve your coordination and your everyday life. Just do it like a game.' So, he put on
the boxing gloves and I said that I was going to hold my hands behind my back. I told him,
'I want you to hit me right here,' pointing to my chin. 'You just hit me right here. I want to
make sure you know how to hit. So, go like this, throw the punch, and move out of the way.
Now we will keep going until you get three points. Three points means you have hit me
solidly three times.' So, he was doing this, trying to throw the punch like this, and I was
moving, just moving out of the way, and stepping out as I needed to. He couldn’t make
contact. He couldn’t make contact because his level of…his lack of coordination was as
evident in martial arts as was in trying to do a Taiji form. So, every time he was throwing a
punch, he was going like this [describe motion]. He did not have any sense of how to punch,
how to use his body, or even to aim the punch. After about the five minutes, he was
exhausted because his part of lack of coordination was also excess effort. He was making
continuous excess effort, always trying when he did not need to try. So, after five minutes
or so, he was exhausted and said 'Can I stop now?', I said, 'No, we are not done. You need
to get three points.' So, we continued. Another ten minutes passed, and he was drenched
with sweat, and so tired. He asked, 'Can I take off the glove now?' I said, 'I will make a
little bit easier for you, and you will get three points soon, but you cannot take off those
gloves until you get three points.' So, we kept going, and I exposed my stomach, allowing
him to hit me, and I exposed my face once and he hit me there. Finally he got three punches.
Then he took off the boxing gloves, and he was about to collapse on the couch, and he said
'Can I sit down now?' and I said, 'No, I want you to do Taiji. I want you to do Taiji right
now.'

Now, when we had started, he had learned the first and second movement of Taiji;
nothing more than that. As far as he was concerned, what he believed about himself, was
that he had never learned Taiji because all he had had to do for the previous months was
watch me do it. So, he said 'O.K. I will try.' And he stood there and he did the whole Taiji
form, from beginning to end. I have never seen anything like this before or since. In all the
years I have been teaching, I've never seen anything so extraordinary because he had learned at an unconscious level. He had learned something that the conscious level had denied. But at the unconscious level, he had learned it and he did the whole form. When he finished, he sat down and said 'Is that O.K.?'

'Do you realize what you just did?'

'What?'

'You did the whole Taiji form beginning to end.'

He said, 'My God, I wasn't even trying. I wasn't even trying' It’s very interesting he said that because that was his problem, trying was the whole problem.

In order to understand this story, considering the acquisition of habit might be helpful. For example, in learning how to typewrite, as in Merleau-Ponty’s example, if I put my body in a space with the keyboard again and again, the keys become incorporated into my body schema.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) describes this state: “The subject knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is, through a knowledge bred of familiarity which does not give us a position in objective space” (p.144). What is important here is that this incorporation requires a certain bodily engagement. Although the space of the keys of the typewriter is integrated into my body schema, the letters are known only when I put my body in a certain situation. In other words, I can not mentally “intend” to type to integrate the keys into my body schema. Rather I need to put my body into a certain position, in order for this aspect of body schema to appear. For example, unless I put my arms into a certain position on the keyboard, the typewriter is still an object of my body; just putting my hands flatly on the keyboard does not bring this integration of the keys into my body schema. In this sense, this incorporation of the typewriter is a matter of bodily intentionality, not my mental intentionality. That is, a certain habitual body incorporated into our body schema does not appear unless we put ourselves in a state where body intentionality can be initiated. In the case of Mr. C’s student, some state in which he could give up
excessive effort might have been required to make the body acknowledge that it had already
acquired the whole Taiji form and to manifest that fact.

In addition, this student of Mr. C seemed to have difficulty in consciously monitoring his
form. Although he must have had “the sense of body,” he somehow had a problem to move the
body as he intellectually understood it, possibly because of “too much effort”, as Mr. C claims.

Usually, when we learn a new skill, we consciously monitor what we do and modify it if there is
some discrepancy between body schema and body image. However, in his case, this process of
modification did not work well. To further elaborate on this point, let me contrast his case with the
description of the acquisition of a new skill which Leder (1990) provides.

The initial stages of mastering a new skill usually involve a complex series of
thematizations. If, for example, I am learning to swim, I pay explicit attention to certain
rules of performance. I am told to cup my hands, lift my arms from the water, and breathe
to one side. Moreover, I attend to the examples provided by others. As Ryle and Polanyi
pointed out, to ‘know how’ to do something need not imply that one intellectually
understands or can explain all that one does. Watching others swim may teach me more
than their words. Finally, even this watching must give way before the body’s need for
direct performance. I imitate the swimmer’s gestures and at last, with misgivings, take the
plunge myself. As I try to swim I consciously monitor my own movements, making sure I
am kicking and breathing correctly. The problematic nature of these novel gestures tends to
provoke explicit body awareness. (pp. 30-31)

In learning to swim, Leder “pay[s] explicit attention to certain rules of performance” and
“consciously monitor[s] his own movements.” This seems to be extremely difficult for Mr. C’s
student because he must have tried too hard in making sure to do his movements correctly.

However, what is striking in this student’s case is that the body itself had acquired a new skill

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84 Refer to the Ichiro Suzuki’s case described in a footnote 24 in p.59.
without mediating through or even opposing to consciously monitoring one’s own movement. In other words, the transformation of body schema could be accomplished without being monitored through body images.

A key to understanding this point is given in Leder’s assertion (1990): “The body masters a novel skill by incorporating its own corporeal history of hours and days spent in practice. I act not just from my present organs, but from a bodily past that tacitly structures my responses” (p.32). Another interviewee, Mr. T, also points out the importance of spending hours and days in practice in the following way:

T: *Qigong* needs to take time. The word *gong* of *qigong* means taking time in Chinese... the maturity of time is extremely important in *qigong*. Whatever genius a person might be, he cannot understand instantly. Even the same words may have different connotations if you take some time to let them ripen. This is what *Yiqixiangsui* means. That is, the more time you take to make *yi* and *qi* get together, the larger area your *qi* can influence...In the beginning, we can conduct only a ridiculously simple dialogue. Then, you don’t have to learn more kinds of *qigong*, but you just repeat the same movement. The more significance you realize from the same movement, the more you may receive answers. For instance, even if I do the same *Suwaisho*, the intensity of the time I spend becomes different. The state of the brain will become different. Then, I become more and more sensitive to the changes in my body, as if the meaning becomes bigger and bigger even if I use the same word. Each time, I have some realization. After ten years of practicing *Suwaisho*, I may still find myself become aware of a part of my body which has never moved before. For example, after relaxing the neck and the shoulders, more blood from the heart may go up to the head. So, we can pay attention to the feeling of how the heart is or how the blood comes down from the head, then the responses will become more and more detailed.

Unique Experiences Emerging from Particular Styles of *Qigong*
In this section, some unique experiences emerging from particular styles of qigong, such as Zen and Tantric Qigong (Chanmigong), Wuji style Tree-Like Qigong (Wuqinxi), Eight Brocades Qigong (Bajinduan), and the Five Animal Frolics (Wuqinxi), are described. Although there are some variations even among these particular styles, the intention of this section is not to describe the process of each style. What is intended here is to elucidate the unique experiences emerged from practicing those particular styles, and explore their meanings for our fundamental views of human nature.

Expansion of Body Image: Zen and Tantric Qigong

As we have examined in the section of “Bodily boundary,” our ordinary body image bounded by the skin can be transformed into the body image of body-in-the-world. In this kind of body image, the boundary of the body is felt as expanding beyond the skin. Mr. T describes the process of such an expansion of body image through image guidance in Chanmigong (禅密功), and compares it with Taiji qigong, another type of qigong designed to expand the body image. Chanmigong has several components aimed at moving the body with a focus on the backbone. Mr. T describes it thus:

T: In Chanmigong, I twist and shake my body. What I am doing with it in terms of the physical dimension is, after all, adjusting my backbone. But if I take this in terms of qi movement, what I do is to expand my Wei qi (衛氣) more and more. Taiji qigong also aims at expanding Wei qi consciously, and I may experience my body expanding when I do these types. However, in Taiji qigong, I do it while keeping a sense of myself, but in Chanmigong, I may get spaced out because I am demolishing my ego by vibrating my body.

The details of this qigong are described in Liu (1988).
What Mr. T implies by “demolishing my ego by vibrating my body” is that through focusing on the backbone and gradually moving it in a spiral way, twisting and shaking, he feels occupied with that movement and loses a sense of his controlling the movement. Then he observes his movement centered from the backbone with a sense of distance; that is, he is clearly aware of his movement but is not engaged with an intention to control. This seems to be the state Mr. T described here.

In the next component, *Huigong* (慧功), he just follows the image guidance with the movement of the backbone which leads him to the experience of expanding the body image:

T: I imagine that my qi is exiting my body through the *Huiyin*\(^{86}\), and I dig down into the earth at my feet. I descend as if I have gotten on an elevator, and reach the deep bedrock of the earth. There, I find a hole. I get into that hole and keep descending down to the very bottom of the bedrock, just before I reach the magma, and I find a well there. That well has pure water and swimming fish...I am guided with these images, which are very Jungian, and I go down there very slowly. Then, after doing this, I come up through all the earth, to the surface of the earth. Without taking a rest, I go up to heaven, to the world of stars where I can touch them and look over the earth, and then I come back.

The very characteristic of this image guidance is to keep it in conjunction with a spiral movement, paying attention to the backbone; as pointed out in the Imagination section, imagination in *qigong* goes along with the sensation of the body. Then, after repeating this vertical expansion of body image, the practice proceeds to the horizontal expansion, which Mr. T describes:

T: After this, in *Huigong*, I switch my consciousness to imagining that I am gliding on the surface of the ocean, looking over the endless horizon like a big screen...In the guidance, a Buddha on a lotus flower comes close to me, and I get on that flower, trading places with the Buddha. Then that lotus flower starts sliding. I repeat this endlessly, while continuing the movement of the figure 8 and allowing additional spontaneous movement. I hold an

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\(^{86}\) *Huiyin* (会陰) is an acupoint located around between anus and genital.
image of expanding endlessly in a horizontal direction. This is a very powerful practice and brings on a trance-like state. My qi actually expands, and it may result in the experience of losing myself. Usually we stop in an hour, and we go thorough Shougong [収功: the closing exercise] by putting up an antenna to return to, to have an image for the content of the body coming back to the flesh.

What is peculiar to this Chanmigong practice is, as Mr. T claims, the expanding the body image without being accompanied with the sense of having a center. Mr. T also describes the difference between this way of expanding the body image and the one in Taiji qigong:

T: The way to expand the range of movement of a ball in the practice of Taiji qigong has some similarity [to Chanmigong]. But it keeps my body here, and I keep the consciousness of expanding Weiqi, so it does not bring on such a trance experience. However, in one particular part, in which I hold a glass ball and have an image of looking at the landscape around me through the ball, my qi expands very much. In this kind of Kai (開) state, I will take enough time to carefully gather the scattered qi . Thus, Mr. T emphasizes the closing exercise called Shougong, in which the practitioner’s gesture is like collecting something into one’s body or putting the hands on the belly or massaging the whole body so that one can sense one’s body. According to the characteristics of these practices of expansion, Mr. T describes the quality of qi in the following way:

T: The mind can go anywhere, but the body is always here and now. What is between the mind going anywhere and the body being here and now is called qi . In order for qi to follow...the only way is to expand gradually. It is not flying away, instead there must always be the ground from which it expands like a concentric circle.

Upright Posture: Wuji Style Standing Like-A-Tree Qigong

In Zhanzhuanggong (standing-like-a-tree qigong), particularly the Wuji style, which means "no ultimate", the practitioner is just “standing by elongating the coccyx straight down, as if the body were a pipe between heaven and earth,” and “sensing that there is no opposed axis, such
as front and back, right and left, or up and down.” The experience of the *Wuji* style *Zhanzhuanggong* that Mr. T describes may lead to a totally different view of upright human posture than the view expressed by the metaphor of resistance.

First of all, let me examine what “standing up” is for us. We may often mistake “standing up” for doing something, and rarely do we stand up just for the sake of “standing up.” For example, I stand up to go to the bathroom, or I stand up to wait for my children to come back, or I stand up to show my presence. In each standing-up, I shift my posture and move my body with great coordination, but I am usually not aware of how I stand up.

Shifting from a posture of lying down on the floor to that of standing up either in one second or in thirty minutes addresses totally different experiences of standing up. When I stand up from the floor in a second, I first jerk up my chin, head, and neck, then I push the floor with both hands so that my upper body can be raised up. I also fold my legs so that the soles of my feet can push the floor strongly enough to raise my lower body. These motions are intended to fight against gravity, resisting its downward forces.

In contrast, when I take thirty minutes to stand up from the floor, I first sense that my whole body is magnetically pulled down onto the floor. The more I sense this pulling-down force, the more I sense the heaviness of my whole body. This sense of heaviness occupies not only my body but also the space around my body. Although I can have a mental image of standing up, it is totally dissociated from my bodily state; in other words, I cannot move my body directly into standing up. Then, having an intention to stand up, I move my hands first to explore the space where I can sense the freedom of moving. Then, gradually my arms roll over side by side so that “the free space” can be expanded. These movements are not to resist against the gravity, but to find the space where my body can move with less gravitational resistance. Gradually this space
expands and my whole body rolls over within it. The spiral movement of my body within this space allows me to eventually stand up. In this process of standing up in thirty minutes, although I am keenly aware of gravity, I am not resisting it but my body finds the space where I sense less gravity and more freedom of movement. However, the process of standing-up either in a second or in thirty minutes shows that our standing posture is more or less the result of our struggle against gravity, and we need to maintain our intention to find a way to overcome it. Erwin Straus (1966) remarks on the essence of this kind of standing up:

In getting up, in reaching the upright posture, man must oppose the forces of gravity. It seems to be his nature to oppose nature in its impersonal, fundamental aspects with natural means. However, gravity is never fully overcome; upright posture always maintains its character of counteraction. It calls for our activity and attention. (p.141)

The human upright posture, which determines the shape and function of our human body, is in a constant relation with gravity. However, if we use the metaphor of “resistance” to express this posture, which, as in Straus’s remarks, may lead to the view that upright posture represents “man's nature to oppose nature in its impersonal, fundamental aspects with natural means.” The upright posture with the “resistance” metaphor implies a quality of my acting towards the world but at the same time it requires keeping hold of myself. In this posture, I sense the strong endeavor to sustain myself, and if I give up holding myself, I collapse on the floor. Straus characterizes the uniquely human aspect of the upright posture in the following:

Upright posture, which we learn in and through falling, remains threatened by falls throughout our lives. The natural stance of man is, therefore, ‘resistance.’ A rock reposes in its own weight. The things that surround us appear solid and safe in their quiet resting on the ground, but man’s status demands endeavor. It is essentially restless. (p.143)

In contrast to Straus’s view, the experience of the Wuji style of Zhanzhuanggong will be quite different. Mr. T describes the experiences evoked from this style of qigong as:
T: Once I feel it deeply, I sense my body floating up. Though I do not physically float up from the floor, the sense of floating is very distinctive. The main characteristic of the *Wuji* style is this floating sense...Unlike other styles of *Zhanzhuanggong*, in which I am supposed to pull my center of gravity down, in the *Wuji* style, I sense myself floating up. This is a release of consciousness from the field of gravity. Though the body is not released, when centrifugal force and gravity attain equilibrium, I sense myself floating up even from the earth.

This sense of floating up evoked in the upright-standing posture of the *Wuji* style of *qigong* may provide us with a different view of upright posture than the metaphor “resistance” does. The characteristic of this experience of *Wuji* style is the awareness of the equilibrium of centrifugal force and gravity. This sense of equilibrium is quite different from the sense that a human being erects himself by resisting gravity, and evokes the sense that “centrifugal force and gravity of the earth happen to be doing *qigong* and thereby I am.” It may take some time to allow yourself to fully experience this giving-up of all axes and entering the balance of centrifugal force and gravity.

In addition, Mr. T also emphasizes that “actually, there is one opposed axis in this *Wuji* style, which is up and down, but this opposed axis is not for me, but for the earth.” What this means is that “this emphasizes giving-up-your-control, and submitting the state in which I am not forcing myself to stand but those two big opposing forces (gravity and centrifugal force of the earth) make me stand.” Philosopher David Michael Levin (1985) also notices the significance of taking these two poles of axis seriously. He describes this metaphorical significance:

> Balance concerns our vertical alignment, our standing in relation to a vertical axis. The two poles of this axis are the earth and the sky, the element of our grounding and the element that teaches us spaciousness. But we forget the earth under our feet: the ground which holds us up and at the same time pulls us down, weighting us with the gravity of our own mortality. (P.273)
Although Levin emphasizes two poles of the axis, the earth and the sky, and the ground holding us up and down, he seems to imply that in order for us to accept this balance, we need not to “forget” the earth under our feet holding us up and down. By contrast, the experience of balance in the Wuji style of qigong comes from the requirement “to forget the earth under our feet.” This forgetting is not only to forget the earth but also to forget the “I” who senses it. Moreover, it is not a mental activity but a very bodily one, as Mr. T illustrates in his statement that “When I ask them in that state to breathe into their navels, it already changes: ‘I’ becomes the center.”

The state of standing upright on the earth shows that equilibrium is already here, working in my body, and forgetting gravity does not mean shutting out its force. In other words, as Mr. T claims, “I am not forcing myself to stand but those two big opposing forces make me stand.” In this state, I am in equilibrium between two opposing forces of the earth. Then, I sense my body floating up. This sense is totally different from when human beings erect themselves by resisting gravity. The experience of the Wuji style of qigong may provide an alternative possibility of human upright standing: a man is in the balance of flowing forces, not resisting those natural forces.

Eyesight and Body Schema: Eight Brocades Qigong

Usually in the practice of qigong the way we see does not involve any special style or techniques. Cohen (1997) describes standard eyesight in qigong practice: “In active qigong, the eyes are generally open, taking in the environment, scanning it without fixing on any particular object. The eyes have a soft focus. They allow the world to come in, without grasping it” (pp.231-232). However, in some practices of qigong, eyesight plays an important role. In the
interview, Mr. T mentions the importance of eyesight in the practice of the Eight Brocades as follows:  

T: In the Eight Brocades, the use of the eyes is important in almost all movements. In the first exercise, you put the arms up like this, with your eyes turned up, not raising the neck completely. This state of eyes turned up makes your eyes rest though they are open. In the second exercise, “Open the Bow as Though Shooting the Buzzard”, you don’t look at the wall but focus on the infinite distance, even if you are doing it in a room. In the fourth exercise, you focus on the horizon. You train yourself to move the eyes, keeping the focus on the horizon. It is a very simple movement, only twisting your body, but the eyes are most important. Also in the fifth, when you stop your movement like this, you support yourself with your eye as if putting a stick on the ground. Then, the seventh is the most notable one, in which you look with an angry gaze. Punching with an angry gaze is expanding your qi field through your eyes.

In order for us to consider the importance of eyesight in the practice of qigong, the following story told by Mr. T may provide us with an interesting clue:

T: This might be off track, but the same kind of thing is done by Kabuki performers. When the Ichikawa Family plays a performance in commemoration of a succession, he does “glaring”. After introducing himself, he glares like this. [describe face] In that “glaring,” if people in the upper gallery do not feel thrilled by his glaring, it will be considered a poor performance. In the Eight Brocades, we do the same glaring. In other words, it is an experiment with the eyes in which one actor tries to expand his qi field to the back of the Kabuki Theater. Of course, he needs to use his voice, but if he cannot convey it with his eyes, he cannot do it with his voice.

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87 Mr. T also suggested that “The sight, the way to look, does not initiate the movement of yingqi (営気), which circulated through the meridian; the bodily movement and breathing are more relevant to that. However, wei qi (衛気) is very much connected with the transpersonal imagination, which gives us a feeling that we become fused with everything, as far as our sight reaches...” The difference between ying qi and wei qi might be defined through the exploration of how movement, breathing, and imagination are relevant to ying qi’s and wei qi’s movements and functions.
To consider this story phenomenologically, we first need to bracket the assumption that a Kabuki performer “passes something through his gaze” and examine what Mr. T means by his phrase, “expanding one’s qi field.” Different from one’s voice, in which we understand that sound waves convey information, our eyes do not convey any physical entity by just looking around.\(^8\)

Next, we must understand the phenomenon in which “people in the upper gallery feel thrilled with his glaring.” In order for us to explore this further, we need to examine their whole bodies-in-the-situation, as Gendlin (1992a) claims.

First of all, we need to shift our focus from perception based on distinct senses to the body in the given circumstance. Traditionally it is believed that humans perceive through different senses, i.e., visual, auditory, or tactile, which have no interconnection (Piaget 1952). However, recent research in psychology and cognitive science claims that “the use of one sensory system can influence (e.g., enhance, degrade, change) perception via another sensory system, and that information can be transferred readily across modalities so that they may substitute for one another (Stein and Meredith 1993, p.1). For example, if someone in a dark room sits on a chair moving in

\(^8\) In his working notes titled “Telepathy--Being for the Other--Corporeality” Merleau-Ponty (1968) examines the issue of perceiving one’s body as visible to the other. He illustrates an example of a woman who “feels her body desired and looked at by imperceptible signs without even looking at those who look at her,” and asserts “[o]ne feels oneself looked at (burning neck) not because something passes from the look to our body to burn it at the point seen, but because to feel one's body is also to feel its aspect for the other (p.245).” Here, Merleau-Ponty points out that our body’s “aspect for the other” is the foundation from which we feel desired and looked. However, his way of dealing with this seer-seen relationship within one’s own body seems to be too much narrowing the concept of intercorporeality down to the experience of the seen. He does not examine the full spectrum of the situation in which the body feeling seen and the body desiring to see are dwelling. For example, in the example of a woman feeling her body desired and looked at, Merleau-Ponty only addressed her feeling “as the seen” and did not take into account the body looking at her. Although in this situation we do not have to assume “something passes from the look,” this situation is also created by the “desire” of the body looking at her. This issue of making the other pole of intercorporeality abstract seems to be problematic with Merleau-Ponty (1964, 1968). For this matter, the witness-mover relationship described in Authentic Movement (Adler, 1999) may provide us with a clue to a further exploring this complex phenomena of the seer and the seen, within the context of movement.
a centrifugal rotation and watches a fixed illuminated line, then the line appears to be tilted to match the effects of rotation. In this case, vestibular activation influences our vision; an airplane pilot may experience the same kind of “oculogravnic illusion.” This kind of intersensory perceptual “illusion” also occurs in auditory-visual perception, in which “one hears ‘ba-ba’ but sees the mouth form “ga-ga’ and perceives the sound ‘da-da’” (Stein and Meredith 1993, p.6). The phenomena of synesthesia are also an example of intersensory perceptual experiences. Although Stein and Meredith (1993) point out that there is “no comparable body of literature describing the neural mechanisms that underlie them [interactions among different sensory modalities]” (p.19), Gallagher and Metzloff (1996), based on the research of imitation of body movements in infants, presents a theory to “explain how cross-modal communication between vision and proprioception is at the same time a communication between sensory and motor aspects of behavior (p.224).” In their view, there are two functions of proprioception: proprioceptive information (PI) serving the body schema and proprioceptive awareness (PA) constituting part of the perceptual aspect of the body image. Therefore, they propose:

Since PI and PA depend on the same physiological mechanisms it would not seem unreasonable to suggest an immediate two-way connection or interactive co-ordination between proprioceptive information, updating motor action at the level of the body schema, and proprioceptive awareness, as a perceptual element of the body image. And since PA and vision are intermodally linked, then there is also a link between vision and PI, or more generally between sensory/perceptual and motor activities (p.224)

In this way, Gallagher and Metzloff (1996) propose that vision is not a mere taking-in of visual information but an active influence on the body schema, which regulates how the body moves and perceives itself in a situation. This relationship between vision and body schema may give us a
clue to understanding the “expanding qi field” through the exploration of the relationship among the ways to look, move and perceive.

Thus, the way we use our eyesight is significant because, when our eyesight expands the body image (proprioceptive awareness), it may impact on the body schema (proprioceptive information) as Gallagher and Metzloff (1996) imply. In order for us to understand more exactly how movement combined with vision can influence the body schema, as in, “punching with an angry gaze is expanding your qi field,” we need more detailed descriptions of such experiences. In addition, how different people’s body schemas interact with each other in a situation should also be explored to understand how sight, body image, and body schema interact with each other. Through such an exploration, the phenomenon in a Kabuki theater in which audiences judge the maturity of a performer’s skill by his glaring can be understood not as receiving something projected from another’s sight, but as an interaction of body schemas in a certain situation, in which, for example, the body schema of the Kabuki performer is able to interact with the body schemata of his audience.

**Becoming Animals: Five Animal Frolics**

There are many styles of *qigong* which imitate the movements of various animals, such as the Five Animal Frolics (*Wuqinxi* 五禽戯) and *Xingyiquan* (形意拳). These *qigong* styles modify the movements of animals like the crane, bear, monkey, deer and tiger, following the characteristics
of each animal. Mr. C performs those movements in the interview and describes his experience in the following: 89

C: Now that feeling of moving like a crane is very different than, (movement) the bear. And, the bear spirit. The power that you are developing in your body from the bear and your feeling you get from the bear, are completely different from the (movement)...monkey. Right? The Monkey develops looseness, loosening the joints, relaxation, springiness and lightness in the legs, for the light spirit. That is different from the deer. So, the deer works the upper body, relaxing, opening the neck and the mid back, and feeling your grace. A different type of awareness. So, when you practice the deer, you see through the eyes of a deer. You don’t imitate the deer, you become the deer...The world is different. Or this one (movement)... The tiger. The Tiger is more aggressive. More Yang, outgoing, power, not so soft as the deer. And the world appears different when you do that. You see differently...that’s the five animals; the crane, bear, monkey, deer, tiger... The other thing about it is that now you feel you are becoming an animal, but also you become open to a realm of communion and a communication with the actual animal. So, from some of the practices of the bear...you will feel a personal connection with the bear when you see the bear in nature. And I believe that the bear also recognizes the very connection of something opening up with some similarity. So, here is the example of the snake.

In these Five Animal Frolics, Mr. C describes how he feels by moving like those animals. However, he also mentions his experience in which he realized that “feeling like” is not good enough for this kind of qigong.

C: So, one time I was with Master C, my first qigong teacher, and I was showing him my Xingyi (形意). We were doing the Chicken. Xingyi has twelve animals. So, I was doing this (movement). I was doing the chicken, and he is standing like this. I thought my move was perfect, and I thought so. So, when I was done, I asked him what was wrong? He said,

89 This description contains two methodologically serious issues. One is that since he performs the different movements of each animal in front of me rather than verbally describing them, the transcription did not capture the potentially rich exploration. Another issue is that the interviewer had not practiced these Five Animal Frolics and did not know what to ask.
'Your movement was perfect, but you were not a chicken.' So, I learned lots from when he said 'not enough chicken.' And he gave me an example. When he got this movement, he looked exactly like a chicken. He said, 'You see, I am a chicken. But you were not a chicken. I am a chicken'. In other words, don’t just imitate. You become an animal.

In this way, moving like some animals is not only meant to make one feel like that animal but also to become it exactly. This difference seems to lie in whether you perceive yourself as if you were an animal or you move as that animal. In other words, the former is to imitate the animal at the level of body image while the latter is on the level of body schema.

Regarding this “becoming an animal,” Mr. T presents a different view. He claims, “In *HuangdineijingLingqu*, there were five categories for human characters, and the Five Animal Frolics were originally designed for those five categories. So, it was meant for people to act out various emotions, like a dress-up doll.” That is, Mr. T takes the difference of each animal as different dimensions of one’s psychological character.

T: “Becoming exactly” is not wrong, but implies only one aspect. What it means is that there is yourself who becomes exactly. Of course, you may have a part of yourself which doesn’t become exactly and feels somehow embarrassed by becoming it. In order to give up such an embarrassing part and become exactly, you need to do many practices. However, what is important for the five animal frolics is the differences among the distances you feel between each animal...Each person has a different experience. That is what they are designed for.... So, first of all, you find the easiest one to imitate. In my case, it is a bear. I even don’t have to play; I am already a bear as I am. Then, since the gesture is very simplified and exaggerated, [by becoming that animal] you may realize how you are looked upon by others, as if you see yourself through a distorted mirror. That is, through playing it, you realize how you have played a bear for a long time, and you look at your own characteristics on that level. Then, if you play other animals, you may find some discomfort. You may find difficulty playing the monkey and tiger. But after a certain period of training,
you may be able to play all five animals in the same way. Then, upon reflecting, you may realize that you had lived only one of your five lives.

Mr. T's unique viewpoint towards the Five Animal Frolics may provide us with a psychological way of understanding qi and qigong. Mr. T describes this as:

T: There are many ways to be in the state of TianDan SuWu (恬淡虚無), and in the practice of qigong, reversing one's development, as in becoming a baby or an ancient person, is a big element. To become an animal is another way. When you reverse the development and maturity process, you may grasp what qi is... For human beings, all the different stages of development are stored in the brain. So, imitating a snake or a turtle may stimulate the autonomic nervous system, and it means to be in communion with our qi and also to focus on our inner qi at the reptile stage.90

The Discrepancy Between Theory and Experience

In this section, some issues relevant to the discrepancy between the theory and experience in qigong practice are examined. In many cases where practitioners are asked to describe their experiences, concept of traditional Chinese philosophy, such as jing, qi, and shen, or traditional Chinese medical terms, are employed. However, those terms as preconceived ideas might not necessarily match precisely what is going on in their experiences. In addition, exploring these issues may shed some light on aspects which were not presented in the literature of qigong.

90 Mr. T also points out that this becoming an animal may have some importance for us in considering current environmental issues. Since most of the ways we deal with these issues come only from human viewpoints, as in either protection or development of the environment, becoming animals, not just thinking about them, may give us a deeper understanding of their perspective and what we should do to deal with human impact on the environment.
In much of *qigong* literature (e.g., Cohen 1997, Ma 1990) *jing, qi, and shen* are referred to as the three treasures. In particular, Taoist *qigong* emphasizes exercises to transform *jing* into *qi*, and *qi* into *shen* (*lianjing huaqi lianqi huashen*, 鍊精化氣 鍊氣化神). Mr. C claims that “When a Westerner is asked the purpose of *qigong*, he is likely to say, ‘to improve health.’ When a Chinese *qigong* master is asked the same question, a common response is, *jing, qi, shen he yi*, (精気神合一) ‘Sexual energy, *qi*, and spirit unified.’” However, though these three have been theoretically emphasized, there seems to be a discrepancy between such theoretical references and experiences in the actual practice. For example, Mr. T points out that “the authentic teacher of the *NeiDan* (内丹) school is very rare, and transforming *jing* into *qi* is widely studied academically but rarely practiced.” In response to my question of how one actually experiences *jing, qi, and shen*, my interviewees present rather unique descriptions.

For example, Mr. C first describes the exercise which are designed to deal with *jing, qi, and shen*.

C: Unifying the treasures... you are doing crane breathing, you are working on the *qi*, just feeling the movement of *Dantian* (丹田). Then you do your deer breathing, just to stimulate *jing*, causing the *jing* to *niliu* (逆流), reverse its course; so it flows up. So, you inhale up, and when you exhale, you release down. So, it is modeled after the deer. Inhale, and on an internal level, *jing* rises, and stands up... For *shen*, when you inhale, you pull back the neck downwards, and imagine the spirit drawing down into the body. Then when you exhale, you release the neck, and the spirit releases, and relaxes. So, that’s also, I think, another side of

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*Jing, Qi, and Shen*\(^9^1\)

*Jing, Qi, and Shen* are three kinds of *qi* divided according to their purity. *Jing* originally meant “pure and bleached rice” and is described as “a subtle and essential energy of origin.” In terms of the human body, *jing* is ascribed to bone marrow, and sperm or menstrual blood, and it resides in the kidney. *Shen* is what manages mental activity as in thought or consciousness. The definitions of *jing, qi, shen* are also provided in the Literature Review section of "The Concept of Qi." (p.69).
qigong, in experience, the realm of experience, the uniqueness of qigong, which is unifying jin, qi, shen, unifying sexual energy, breath, and spirit.

Then, in response to my question of how he really experiences jing as different from qi or shen, he mentions it not as a distinctive experience, but rather as an experience brought on through certain exercises designed for jing:

C: Now, how do I experience these things? I think of jing as an energy that flows downward, dissipates down. It has.... It’s paradoxical to speak about. And yet, jing I think, is...No, I am not sure that it’s so much that one experiences jing as one experiences the effect of exercise that is designed to conserve jing. For example, I don’t think that jing itself is a truly distinctive experience, at least, not from my perspective.

Here, responding to my question and focusing on his experiential understanding, Mr. C made a significant comment: “I don’t think that jing itself is a truly distinctive experience,” and then he continues to explore how he experiences jing in the following way:

C: Yet, if one does exercises that are designed to prevent the dispersal of jing, there is a unique experience associated with the effect of that exercise. So, for example: you are contracting Hui Yen,(会陰) up with inhalation and releasing it with exhalation. When you finish that, you feel energized and vibrant, full in a different way than if you were just watching the breath. And it seems to provide an experiential collaboration with a Chinese theory which is that jing flows out like water unless it is reversed...Similarly, shen, I believe, is the aspect of consciousness and energy that moves out into the world. That is the way I think of shen. It is an aspect of oneself that moves out into the world. So, anytime there is a withdrawal, similar to Pratchahara in Yoga, there is a withdrawal of the senses inward. So, that is the I, instead of looking out, dropping inside. Then shen is conserved, and you feel you have more control, you feel apt to make decisions more easily. You don’t feel preoccupied with things that are happening outside.... Yes, we can look outside, but we can also drop awareness within. When you drop awareness within, that is the equivalent to what the Chinese call conserving shen. Because shen is consciousness like fire, it goes out unless it’s brought down, just as jing is like water, sexuality and vitality that flows down unless it is brought up.
Similar to Mr. C’s view of *jing, qi, and shen*, Mr. T views *jing* as the total function of the body as a physiological system, which is a non-cultivated *qi*.\(^{92}\) He states this view thus:

T: The closest experience I may have to that idea [*RenjinHuaqi, 鍊成化気*]\(^{93}\) is when I experience the transformation of my bodily senses, from *jitsu* to *kyo*. Describing it simply, when I [imagine]\(^{94}\) holding a ball like this and the ball becomes “matured,” the ball which is not there becomes *jitsu*; in sensing the movement of the ball, the ball is *jitsu* and this [pointing to his body] is *kyo*... It gives me a sense of freedom, not the sense that I am restricted by the skin, but the sense that the *qi* surrounding my body extends from and also enters into my body... I also have a sense of unification which comes from the disappearance of distance between things. These senses emerge when I transform *kyo* to *jitsu* and become *kyo* myself. So, this ball exists as *jitsu*, but what moves it is *kyo*... The point is not whether the *qi* ball between my palms exists or not, but that my bodily consciousness gets transformed through imagining the *qi* ball between my palms and concentrating my mind there... The experience of *kyo* is like a loss of boundary between my own body and the surrounding air. Just being there. Since it is movement from the center, I still have a sense of center. But the heaviness of the body which I usually sense when I stand up will completely disappear... My own presence seems to be grasped as rather a swirl than a weighted substance. I take that swirl as my own self... a movement freely coming in and out beyond the skin... Even when I am in an ordinary state, I sense *qi* in my own body. That seems to be close to what *jing* implies. I mean, the total function of the body as a physiological system is *jing* as uncultivated *qi*... Then, when I get into a *qigong* state, I sense my own body as different from the physicality which I sense in my ordinary state of consciousness. I call this sense *qi*.

In this way, Mr. T describes *jing* as the state in which he experiences the body as an ordinary physiological system and *qi* as the state in which he experiences no boundary between his

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\(^{92}\) Mr. T also describes the difference between *qi* and *jing* by referring to *jitsu* and *kyo*. This difference is examined in the section of "Transformation of Body Images" (p.108).

\(^{93}\) The definition of *RenjinHuaqi* is provided in the Literature Review, "The Concept of *Qi*."

\(^{94}\) The characteristic of imagination in *qigong* is discussed in the section of "Imagination" (p122).
body and the air, like a swirl. On the other hand, Mr. C implies that the experiences of jing, qi, and shen are brought on by the exercises designated for jing, qi, and shen. However, in either case, these experiential descriptions of jing, qi, and shen by Mr. T and Mr. C are quite different from what the literature of qigong describes.  

**TCM and Qigong**

The Modern practice of qigong is sometimes recognized as a part of traditional Chinese medicine (i.e., Lin, et al., 2000). Although various types of knowledge from TCM have been adopted into qigong practice, such as tapping and stretching along meridian lines, the interviewees claim that there are some differences between qigong and TCM. First of all, the difference is, as Mr. C claims, that in qigong it is believed that “Yi can direct qi anywhere in the body or outside of the body.” That is, the connections in the body recognized in the experience of qigong could be much broader than that of the meridians described in TCM. Mr. C states it in this way:

C: I think that there are people specialized in medical qigong; you can apply qigong within the framework of TCM. So, although they might use some of the traditional qigong styles that do not require TCM knowledge, it is also possible to, for instance, direct awareness to specific acupuncture points for specific problems to help patients become aware of them, maybe massaging the Zusanli (足三里) point here, stomach thirty-six, and then thinking of that point to help correct the stomach problem. Or moving the qi along the particular meridians, maybe running the qi up the bladder meridians along the spine. So you could easily apply qigong as a TCM practice. But I believe that historically the main purpose of qigong has been to create, to detoxify, to rid the body of toxic qi, and to gather fresh qi and send it where it is needed. The process of using yi to direct qi does not have to follow

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95 What is missing in these interviews is the psychological aspect of these transformations from jing to qi, and from qi to shen. Yuasa (1999) proposes viewing these transformations in terms of those of libido.

96 *Zusanli* (足三里) is stomach meridian acupoint located on the outside of the foot.
meridian pathways. It can, and maybe sometimes that’s helpful. But it is not necessary for self-healing in *qigong*...I think what TCM describes is correct, but it’s not the whole story...the mind can direct *qi* from one, from any acupuncture point to anywhere else in the body, even if it’s not on the meridian system or if it fits on a different meridian. An example would be a person who can send a pulse into an acupuncture point like this, saying *Hogu* (合谷), here.[pointing his hand] And it is pretty easy usually to feel that stimulation. This is on a large intestine meridian. But, if, as you do this [Mr. C demonstrates looking at *Hogu*], you think of your eyes, you can send *qi* from here to your eyes. How is that possible? According to TCM, there is no meridian that connects that way. In this way, Mr. C claims that because of the guidance of *yi*, the connections in the body can be much broader than what TCM describes as meridian systems. In addition to this difference, Mr. Z also describes the difference between his method of *qigong* treatment and TCM treatment. Mr. Z is an expert in both TCM and *qigong*. For the simpler cases, he says he follows the TCM style, but for a difficult case, he takes the *qigong* way. In his *qigong* treatment techniques, he emphasizes his intuition, rather than knowledge from TCM. For example, in his diagnostic process for *qigong* treatment, Mr. Z describes his own immediate feelings as a tool for his diagnosis.

Z: In the beginning, in the start, I have to give a *qigong* diagnosis. What is wrong with the patient’s *qi*? That is what I usually do. You know, in Chinese medicine, for a diagnosis you look or watch, or hear or ask, or pulse-feel. I think for *qigong*, for *qigong* treatment, it’s almost the same. You need to watch, look, or first feel. Just looking at a patient, sometimes you know, you just know what is wrong with the patient, meaning with his *qi*. 
M: So, like if the color of my face is dark or... 
Z: No, no, that one is the traditional Chinese Medicine way. In the *qigong* way, maybe it is just by feeling. 'Oh, there are some energy blocks here.' Or you have some problem somewhere else. You just feel... The first one is like this, just feeling. You don’t know, no theory, just feeling. You just know what the problem is. Sometimes, by feeling, or maybe

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97 *Hogu* (合谷) is a large intestine meridian acupoint located between the roots of the thumb and index
you watch or see. Some problem with his heart, and I say to myself, “oh my heart feels uncomfortable.” The patient has low back pain, and I feel, 'Oh, I have low back pain at the same time.' Or sometimes you can see qi; what Western people call 'Aura.' The aura is too high or too low, the color is not so good. Or sometimes we need to touch, maybe you don’t need to touch, just your body can feel it somewhere. I feel, check my own body, if it is too cold or too hot, or there is numbness or sometimes tingling, or pricking, then that part of the patients’ body may have a problem.

In the more extreme case, Mr. Z claims that he does not even have to see the patient, and can rely on various feelings he may have.

Z: Or sometimes we don’t need to see you. Maybe we just, sometimes, you just mention somebody’s name. Oh, we can see, how that person feels, yeah maybe, sometimes, there is somebody I can do that with like an X-ray, I can see your different areas, like an X-ray.... Perhaps you have heart disease, I can see it. I cannot see the heart here, but somewhere in my mind, your body’s picture, I can feel it. Oh, this area is dark, oh there is energy blockage. Or I can hold your energy in my hand, from different parts of your body. I can specifically connect with some parts of your body, and a special feeling tells me if you have problems. These methods are called qigong diagnosis. Many kinds. You just can feel...perhaps bad qi is there or a qi blockage or an energy imbalance, maybe more in the heart or maybe more in the lower part, maybe on the left side or right side. If all the qi is deficient, there is not enough qi, it’s just deficient, or weak, I can send good energy to you.

In this way, in his qigong diagnosis, Mr. Z takes his intuitive and empathic feelings as an important tool. Then, even in the qigong treatment, he also does not conduct it in a specific way, but rather gives up thinking and allows himself just to be open. He describes one of his most extraordinary experiences:

Z: Almost twenty years ago in China, the Beijing Third Medical School hospital asked me to see one patient. This patient was a young man who had some emergency like pancreatitis, made everything was damaged. His intestines, everything...opening could not be done. No
idea. How could we do it? Just dying. They asked me to do something. I didn’t know how. I just used energy, sent qi into him. Maybe thirty minutes I was there. The second day, they called and said, 'Everything is OK.' No more problem. Everything is good. He’s eating and digesting normally. I never thought about how to do it; the qi just did it. Very interesting, even I didn’t know how to do it. It was very complicated. The qi, you don’t know how...For this kind of patient, I mostly just sit there. I don’t need anything else. Just the patient is there, and I don’t know what kind of qi he needs. Sending some qi to the only liver does not work. I just use the whole qi. Sometimes I send qi to the patient, and the patient can feel the organ move. Sometimes, there is shaking, sometimes people feel a wonderful sensation like turning. But I don’t think about doing that. For me, qigong treatment is...a kite. I don't need to think about it specifically. In the beginning, I focused on it very specifically, but after many years, I just send the energy and then it works by itself.

This way of treatment seems to correspond with the experiences described in the section titled "Intention.” That is, the state in which “yi is accompanied by qi and qi is accompanied by yi.”

For this kind of treatment, Mr. Z describes what he does in the following way:

Z: You need to prepare, you need to open your Bahui (百会)\(^98\) point. If you treat a patient, you just relax, automatically it happens. You don’t think “oh the energy from there is coming through me.” You don’t need to think...you just relax. If you get more relaxed, you have more energy. It is like Taiji... Somebody send yi from the dantien, qi from here, to...the patient. It is a hard work to treat a patient, maybe one day one patient... Sometimes, you just use your awareness to open. Open this area. Or sometimes you need to touch...Open and send energy, go in. Sometimes, you just send the energy here, and energy can work for you. Just send it like a qi missile. Like a missile, you send qi. You don’t think about qi. Wherever qi is needed you go in. How qi works for this area, qi does it automatically. Your body has more self-direction from your exercises, from your learning.

In this way, the difference between TCM and qigong is expressed by the interviewees as two points: First, since yi can direct the connection of qi, qigong provides the practitioner with

\(^{98}\) Bahui(百会) is an acupoint located at the top of the head.
experiences of much broader connections than described in TCM. Secondly, qigong allows the practitioner to trust his intuitive feelings rather than preconceived, specific sets of diagnoses and ways of treatment.

**Emotions and Organs**

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), emotions are conceived as connecting with the systems of organs. Although TCM has extensive documents on these connections (i.e., Ots, 1990) and the literature of qigong (i.e., Cohen, 1997) often mentions these connections, how emotions and organs are experientially connected with each other in qigong practices is not clear. This question might be relevant to the issue Ots (1994) brought up: the emphasis on quietness and balance in qigong theory leads to the oppression of the emotional expression of the leib. Ots (1994) reports on qigong practices which induce spontaneous movements:

> In the contemporary Chinese context, the framework of public discourse left little if no positive space for emotions. Because emotions are understood to make the body move in qigong, the movements themselves became stigmatized. The cultural value of control, quietness, relaxation, and harmony turned against a body in e-motion. (p.112-113)

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Yuasa (1994) points out that organs in Eastern medicine should not be identified with organs in Western medicine, but should be regarded as the various systems of physiological functions. For example, “the liver” is the autonomic nervous system related to the liver, “the heart” is the function of the heart and psychological processes, and so on. With this view, the issue of connection between emotions and organs will be modified. It would be important to collect experiential descriptions from this viewpoint.
The following story by the qigong practitioner I interviewed will provide the same discrepancy between theoretical and experiential explanations of emotions. Mr. C describes this connection between emotions and organs in the following way:

C: I have never felt...to be honest, when I look at internal organs, I do not directly feel an emotional energy in the organ. I know that the classics say that fears reside in the kidney and anxiety in the lung, trust and empathy in the spleen and so on. But I believe that that is an association that was developed through awareness of the effects of emotional pathology on organ health. As a result, we understand the association and we know that fear in fact disturbs the kidneys and weakens the kidneys. Or, we know that becoming overexcited weakens the heart, and makes a person more prone to a heart attack. Because we understand that, we can use the emotions to heal the organs. We can understand how emotions can harm, might potentially harm the organs, and might give us more inspiration to maintain emotional balance.

But, I don’t...my personal experiences have never been to actually sense an emotion in the organ. If I try to just approach it very quietly, meditatively, without a preconceived idea, of course, I can say to myself, 'there is a kindness in my liver, Ren, benevolence in the liver.' I could say to myself that there is a benevolence in the liver, and because of my preset idea, I might experience that. I might deceive myself and say, 'Oh, yes, the liver is kindness.' But what I would be experiencing, if I had no idea of what was supposed to be there, and I was simply exploring, my personal experience would be 'No.'

In this way, Mr. C claims that he has not directly experienced emotions in the organs through qigong, though he knows that such connections have been described in the classic literature and used in TCM treatments. Then, Mr. C describes his understanding of such a connection between emotions and organs rather as indirect, that is, “association.” He describes his understanding in the following way:

C: Nevertheless, I do feel that it is true that if you think of inhaling Ren (仁: benevolence), and exhaling anger from the liver, that you will heal the liver. That is the association. So,
those feelings affect the liver, but they are not experienced in the liver directly...Inhale that feeling into the liver, and exhale the feeling of anger, and then if you are working on the lungs, you inhale yi (義)--the other Confucian virtue which, although usually translated into righteousness, I have adapted for Westerners as: telling people to imagine they are drawing a feeling of dignity and integrity, and even justice--into the lungs.

And then when they exhale, they exhale anxiety. So when inhaling, you feel dignity, confidence in who you are, and you exhale anxiety. And it works. If people have problems with anxiety, they feel less anxious afterwards, and they feel more openness in the lungs, so you can help to heal the lungs. Some have bronchitis, and they can heal more easily if they release the emotions, those pathogenic emotions that get stored in the lungs, and so on. For each of the organs, there are positive emotions that help it, and negative emotions that harm it.

This way of association between emotions and organs seem to be connected with what Ots (1990) claims, that in Chinese medicine and qigong, the organ is taken as a metaphor for emotions. He points out that in these traditions “the treatment is not primarily oriented towards emotional change. The treatment tries to harmonize the emotions by harmonizing bodily functions” (p.29).

Mr. C gives an example of how he treats emotions by utilizing qigong practice, which he calls “emotional qigong.”

C: That’s what happens when the emotions get out of the balance. Someone has maybe some upsetting situation, let’s see, like driving in traffic, someone cuts you off, and gives you the finger. You feel, you start to think, 'Oh, what’s wrong with them. I almost caused an accident.' Maybe your children are in your car, and you are worrying about the safety of the children, and then you realize because you have a qigong practice that in your body, it is almost as if qigong creates a centripetal force. In other words, you keep returning back to the center more easily than someone who does not have a practice. So, instead of becoming reactive, or letting your emotions get out of control, or instead of starting a fight with that person in the other car, or losing your ability to drive safely, what you do is you feel a little bit upset, that’s a normal human reaction, and you think that this person is an idiot, he
should not have a driver’s license. But you go right back into your center, you continue to drive this way. Your children see a human reaction, but they also know that there is an integrity, there is a sense of self there that allows you not to get overly wrapped up, overly preoccupied with an emotional situation. I think that is high qigong. I think that is an emotional qigong. So we express human emotions, but we maintain the feeling of who we are.

Then, Mr. C points out several concrete ways to deal with emotions through qigong. First, he points out the importance of returning to a balance, in which he emphasizes contacting nature when one gets upset or loses one's balance.

C: Let’s take the opposite situation; someone is depressed. Let’s say, you fail a series of tests in school. And then you lose your money invested in the stock market because it crashed. And the car breaks down a week later. You think that this is horrible. You ask yourself 'What do I have left?' and you start going into a depression. But because of qigong, you can feel immediately the damaging effect this is having on your health, on your qi. Because you are used to doing maybe half an hour or an hour of qigong in the morning, you know what it feels like to be in good health, to be aware of yourself. So, you are more aware, more sensitive to the damaging physiological effects of depression. So, perhaps what you do is you say to yourself, 'This is really horrible,' but you think, 'I need to take a walk.' That’s already good qigong. You take a walk and you sensitize your feet to the qi of the ground. Perhaps you go to your favorite tree and stand facing the tree and you just try to commune with the energy of the tree, try to feel the root, the deep root of the tree, try to feel the strength of the tree, the tall branches, and you feel it is more easy to say, 'Yes, this is terrible, but I can handle it. I can do it.' So, with any kind of emotional upset, or emotional change, you should be able to have human feelings, be able to express them and experience them, but we can return to the center more easily. We don’t go as far off-center. People that do qigong don’t lose control, not because they try to control themselves, but because of the natural centeredness, power, and integrity of the being...and also sensing nature and knowing when you are wandering away from nature. That’s the big part of it.
Thus, in qigong tradition, being balanced and centered is regarded as the most important thing. Even in a situation where one may get extremely emotional and lose balance, one is encouraged to go back to the balance by harmonizing the emotions by practicing qigong or even suppressing such emotions, as Ots (1994) points out. However, the underlying premise of this view, that losing balance, i.e., becoming highly emotional, is one’s fault and one should take responsibility to take it back, may bring up some problems, since human emotional reactions are mostly relational and situational. That is, if we take the metaphor of the qi flowing body, which connects inside and outside the body, human emotions and the states of various physiological functions related to them, as TCM theories claim, should not be totally taken as the individual body’s concern. Therefore, viewing human emotions as only a matter of balancing one’s internal functions should be reconsidered as congruent with the metaphor of the qi flowing body.

Environment and Qigong

As described in the sections "Transformation of Body Image and Boundary", the practice of qigong may bring some experiences that take us beyond our ordinary body image bounded by the skin. Such experiences may provide us with an awareness of the interaction between the body and the environment. In addition, through practice, the practitioner may become more and more sensitive to such an interaction. However, in our modern world, where environmental destruction is getting more and more serious, this characteristic of qigong is not always positive, but may bring up some problems. Mr. Z shows his deep concern for practicing qigong under the conditions of modern environmental destruction:

Z: You just do a basic exercise qigong, and that is OK. But people still ask me to go a little higher than that. But at higher levels of qigong, now I am concerned about teaching it.
Even for me, the exercises are worrisome too. What is of most concern is just environmental change. And my life style has changed. In China, life was very easy, but here, you don’t know where life is going... That’s why practicing a higher level of qigong is like: when your speed is very high and very fast, it is easier to injure yourself.….That’s why now in China, many qigong practitioners, qigong masters, have serious diseases or symptoms, or they do not have a long life, and die young. That’s why my friend, Mr. Wang, talked about one word, a new word, Qigong Bing (気功病), qigong disease. It’s from qigong exercise. He almost died. He is maybe a little older than me. A few years ago, he almost died. All the medicine, the hospitals, did not work. But some qigong persons helped. Qigong people helped this person. But he talked about qigong bing, qigong disease, meaning something is wrong with qigong practices.

Mr. Z claims that the basic qigong is not the problem, but if we become more sensitive through the practice of qigong, then it might be possible to have certain diseases. He mentioned some cases in which he helped other people close, to become less sensitive, rather than open, to be more sensitive.

Z: A Qigong person is more sensitive. It’s a good thing to be more sensitive, but a bad thing to be too sensitive. But this problem, in ancient times, for Taoists or Buddhists, was not a problem. They didn’t think about this. Now it’s everywhere. I call it emotional pollution. Newspapers, TV, shootings. The newspapers have lots of bad news. Or something bad is happening, like the war in Kosovo. Dr. I had some practitioner, who is a chiropractor, and when the Kosovo war happened, he felt the energy of the war here...His patients...All connected. That’s why for me, I like patients to do just basic qigong. Meditate not very deeply, just a few minutes. Your body gets relaxed, and that is enough. Don’t think about spirits outside or talk about telling the future, or about some Shendon [仙道], see your inside with your mind, but don’t think about it. You can just be. But don’t use your third eye very much. In China, I helped lots of patients to close, close the third eye. The problem is not to open. Maybe I told you. I know one very famous practitioner in China. Once every
year he had a high fever, almost dying every time. He asked me what the cause was, and I
checked and said, “I think you are too sensitive here.” I helped him to close.

Mr. Z expresses his concern and at the time of the interview he did not know what to do about this
problem. He claims:

Z: I think 90% of practice is a good thing; making your immune system stronger, fighting,
protecting. But maybe for a few people, their immune system comes down. But most
qigong makes their immune system strong... For a special qigong master, there is a
problem... That’s why they call it qigong bing, qigong disease. Now I think about this. We
don't know. It is still a big question mark...sensitive is good, but too sensitive is a problem.
Over-sensitive is a problem...Mostly qigong makes people more sensitive...To be less
sensitive, I think maybe what is more needed is quiet qigong. But quiet qigong still can
make you sensitive. Now I just think. No answer...We have little research but now it is too
early to talk about it. Too early. But I have to think of something.

Actually, none of the literature on qigong mentioned this kind of concern for doing the
practice in our worsening environment, but two other interviewees also expressed their concerns
for this issue. For example, Mr. C mentions the lack of such concern among teachers:

C: Or if you live in an ugly environment, how can you develop fresh qi, if you work, say, in
the Holland tunnel in New York City? If you work in the tunnel and you breathe car
exhaust constantly, then all you are doing with qigong is trying to prevent the ill effects of
your environment. Well, that might be necessary, I mean, if you have to work in a horrible
environment, and then of course qigong is helpful. But to get the full benefits of qigong
then you try to find a healing environment. Then, when you practice qigong, everything is
in harmony...Unfortunately, there has been a history of abuse of the natural environment in
China, since the Han dynasty. It’s been a long-standing problem. Why is it that all the
Taiji and qigong masters chain-smoke cigarettes? One of my teachers is a wonderful,
woman, Madam G. She is in her eighties, she does not smoke, she has a healthy
lifestyle, but she told me that she was so surprised when she met me and H.M., my Taoist
brother and colleague, who is another Chinese-speaking qigong teacher. She said she was
so surprised when she met the two of us because she said, 'Do other American qigong teachers not smoke?' She said, 'This is very rare in China.' In China, all the Taiji masters, all the qigong masters constantly smoke cigarettes. So, in China, I think, as much as, perhaps more than, in the United States, people don’t always see the connection between lifestyle and the habits of self-care associated with qigong cultivation. It’s absolutely essential. Part of qigong is recycling. Where do they say that in qigong books? You look at all those books coming out of China, I don’t know one single book from China where it says, 'to practice qigong, make sure you recycle, or don’t waste, or use fewer resources, or simplify your lives so you are not such a consumer, or drive your car less.' Instead, it’s "No, become a consumer, get a car, become successful, make money with qigong." It’s a strange world we are in.

Then, Mr. C emphasizes learning about the natural environment from indigenous cultures. He claims that qigong can provide fundamental wisdom to the body, and we need a certain regional wisdom from indigenous cultures.

C: Indigenous cultures have preserved the wisdom that comes from living in nature. In other words, it’s not that they are providing methods that help you to return to that wisdom. That wisdom has been there all along. However the understanding of the natural environment is quite unusual, not found or rarely found among present-day qigong practitioners. There are also spiritual techniques that are, I think, an important part of human potential, such as the way of encouraging more meaningful dreams, which is extremely rare in qigong, and there is also concrete information about the environment where an indigenous culture is. Chinese techniques of healing are universal because of the common nature of the body, but literature about the Chinese landscape cannot teach us about North Americans. So, living here, you need to learn from the American Indians. How is the fungus on that Aspen tree used to heal a virus? Or how can we use a modern plant to stop addictions? Or how can we use the water in a stream to purify ourselves by imaging that it is taking poisons out of the body? That is a sort of indigenous qigong.

There are lots of techniques that developed from the American landscape, that are still understood today by the native people of North America. And that is the information you
cannot get from China. China, yes, it has wonderful methods of healing, because the human body is the same. Whether Chinese, African, Japanese, or American, human bodies are basically the same. You can use penicillin to heal a Japanese throat or an African Zoole throat. And you can use qigong technique to heal asthma, whether someone is from the Caribbean or the North Pole. But to learn what the bear symbolizes and have a bear teach you in North America, the Native Americans have more to say about their habitat. And they have songs, and a use of language that is also appropriate for this land.

This issue of practicing qigong in this worsening environment has seldom been mentioned in the literature of qigong and ecological concern seems not to be so strong among qigong practitioners in general. However, as these interviewees point out, the significance of keeping a good environment for the practice of qigong is obvious regarding the characteristics of "the qi flowing body." One of the reasons why this kind of environmental concern is not strong might be that it did not occur to the ancient people who practiced qigong. Because of this matter, it is very significant to revise various theories and theoretical concerns in terms of the experiences of contemporary qigong practitioners.

100 One exception is a magazine “気功与環境 (Qigong and Environment)” published in China (Tsumura, personal communication)