

修煉

xiulian — inner cultivation

Traditional Chinese Inner Cultivation

Inner cultivation (*xiulian* 修煉) as the common root
of *wen* 文 and *wu* 武

Volume III of a three-volume series on the martial, the civil,
and the cultivated human being

A source-based scholarly investigation of its concepts,
its history, and its integration into modern life

by Eike Andreas Opfermann (歐陽德客)

A scholarly work for practitioners, teachers, and masters

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*This short volume treats inner cultivation (xiulian, including Qigong),
which lies as the common root beneath both sides of the conceptual pair wen wu 文武.
Volume I unfolded the wu, the martial; Volume II the wen, the civil and cultural;
their union, wen wu shuang quan 文武雙全, is the guiding ideal of the series.
With this third volume, the triad announced in Volumes I and II is complete.*

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Summary

The present work concludes a three-volume series. Volume I traced the traditional Chinese martial-arts education, the *wu* 武, in its entirety; Volume II the civil scholarly education, the *wen* 文; both, at every load-bearing point, pointed to a common root whose thorough treatment they reserved for a short third volume. This volume redeems that promise. Its subject is inner cultivation, in Chinese *xiulian* 修煉, together with the bodily practice known today under the collective name Qigong 氣功: the patient, stepwise refinement of body, breath, attention, and moral nature that the Chinese tradition carried forward as its own spiritual path alongside and beneath martial and civil education.

Unlike Volumes I and II, which followed a historical skeleton, this volume is deliberately built along conceptual and systematic lines, for its task is one of clarification. It first unfolds the conceptual family of cultivation (*xiu* 修, *lian* 煉, *xiulian*, *xiuzhen* 修真, *xiuxing* 修行, *yangsheng* 養生) and distinguishes it from the Confucian *xiushen* 修身, which Volume II presented as the core of civil education. It then traverses the historical arc in a single chapter: from the *daoyin* gymnastics that the Mawangdui find proves for the second century BCE, through Daoist inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) and Buddhist practice (*xiuxing*), to the exercise sequences of the Ming and Qing periods, to the invention of the modern term Qigong in the twentieth century, to the “Qigong fever” of the eighties and nineties, to Falun Dafa 法輪大法 as the best-known living path of cultivation in the present, and to Taijiquan 太極拳 insofar as it is practiced as health cultivation. The systematic centerpiece is the core clarification of the relationship among *xiushen*, *xiulian*, and modern mindfulness — and the argument for why this root carries both sides of the ideal *wen wu shuang quan* 文武雙全.

The contemporary section follows the method of the series. It presents the clinical evidence on Taijiquan and Qigong, the densest of the entire field treated by the series, foremost the meta-analyses on fall prevention, and weighs it by strength of evidence; it names the honest limits as well as the points at which the market promises more than the sources and the research can bear. In practical terms, the volume closes with six design principles, three exercise plans for realistic life situations, and a twelve-week progression that fits the daily silent practice into the same modern life for which Volumes I and II designed their plans.

One clarification stands above all, and it is the same as in the sister volumes: the lasting value of this tradition lies in its pedagogy — the daily, small, year-on-year sustained practice that transforms the person rather than filling him — and in its seriousness in placing the formation of character above the formation of the body. The tradition needs no exaggeration to be worth preserving; it gains when examined closely.

Prefatory Note on Sources

For inner cultivation, the source problem of the series holds in an intensified form. The pre-modern record is rich in legend — in founding attributions to immortals, patriarchs, and famous physicians — and poor in contemporary documentation; the modern literature, in turn, is a field in which serious religious-studies and medical research mixes with a great mass of promotional, ideological, or politically charged text, and in both directions: there is a literature of glorification that attributes miracles to cultivation, and a literature of denigration that sees in it nothing but superstition or politics. This work keeps its distance from both. Like the series as a whole, it distinguishes three types of statement: founding legends, which are recounted but explicitly named as legends; datable texts, institutions, and archaeological finds, whose source the footnote states; and the modern empirical findings of peer-reviewed research, weighted by

strength of evidence. This source-critical stance has a tradition in China itself — for the martial arts it was established by Tang Hao 唐豪, for the classics by the philological school of the Qing period (*kaozheng* 考證), and for the exercise sequences of cultivation it was likewise Tang Hao who separated the legends from the sources.¹

The account rests on five groups of sources. First, on classical primary sources and archaeological finds: the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 with the earliest mention of *daoyin* 導引, the medical manuscripts of Mawangdui 馬王堆 with the *Daoyintu* 導引圖, for which Donald Harper's standard edition is authoritative,² as well as the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) for the Confucian *xiushen*. Second, on the religious-studies scholarship on Daoist and Buddhist self-cultivation, above all on Livia Kohn and Louis Komjathy,³ supplemented by Rupert Gethin's overall account of the Buddhist path of practice.⁴ Third, for the twentieth century, on David A. Palmer's history of Qigong, the only scholarly overall account of the "Qigong fever,"⁵ and for Falun Dafa on the religious-studies standard works of David Ownby and Benjamin Penny as well as on the *Zhuan Falun* 轉法輪 as the primary source of its self-understanding.⁶ Fourth, on the scholarly reference apparatus of ChinaKnowledge.de for data and institutional detail. Fifth, for the health-related sections, on peer-reviewed clinical research, in particular meta-analyses and systematic reviews on Taijiquan, Qigong, meditation, and breathwork; every such citation was bibliographically verified, and its limits are noted in place.

The reader will note that this volume is more restrained at one point than its sister volumes: where Volume I could examine techniques and Volume II texts, Volume III treats a practice whose actual subject — the inner transformation of the practitioner — largely escapes measurement. The work therefore states what can be documented, marks what is the traditions' own self-understanding, and does not assert what can neither be documented nor honestly derived from the sources.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of this inquiry stand, as at the beginning of its sister volumes, two images. The first is a piece of painted silk. In 1973, from Tomb 3 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 near Changsha, a panel was recovered, dated to around 168 BCE, showing dozens of human figures in four rows: men and women, old and young, in everyday dress, stretching, bending, reaching, and breathing, some in imitation of animals, some with captions that assign an exercise to an ailment.⁷ It is the earliest pictorial evidence of a methodical, therapeutic, everyday cultivation of body and breath — older than any documented martial art and older than the examination system, and it shows no warriors and no scholars, but practicing people. The second image is of today: an adult belonging to that scant third of the world's population that does not meet the minimum

¹ On critical historiography cf. Volume I, prefatory note; on Tang Hao's source criticism of the attributions of the exercise classics, Shahar, Meir: *The Shaolin Monastery. History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts*, Honolulu 2008, chapter on the *Yijinjing* tradition.

² Harper, Donald: *Early Chinese Medical Literature. The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*, London 1998.

³ Kohn, Livia (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation. Traditional Models and Contemporary Practices*, Magdalena (NM) 2006; Kohn, Livia: *Chinese Healing Exercises. The Tradition of Daoyin*, Honolulu 2008; Komjathy, Louis: *Cultivating Perfection. Mysticism and Self-Transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*, Leiden 2007.

⁴ Gethin, Rupert: *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford 1998.

⁵ Palmer, David A.: *Qigong Fever. Body, Science, and Utopia in China*, New York 2007.

⁶ Ownby, David: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, New York 2008; Penny, Benjamin: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, Chicago 2012; Li Hongzhi 李洪志: *Zhuan Falun* 轉法輪, Beijing 1995.

⁷ On the *Daoyintu* 導引圖 ("Chart of Guiding and Pulling") cf. Harper: *Early Chinese Medical Literature*; further Volume I, Chapter 4.4.

recommendations for physical activity,⁸ opens a mindfulness app in the evening because something is missing for which he has no precise word: calm, composure, a relationship to his own body and his own conscience. The question of this work is what the tradition that begins with the silk panel honestly has to offer this person — and what it does not.

This volume is the third and shortest of a series, and it carries its architecture at the most sensitive point. The series orders traditional Chinese education of the person around the conceptual pair *wen* 文 and *wu* 武, the civil and the martial, with the ideal of *wen wu shuang quan* 文武雙全, the person complete in both. Volume I unfolded the *wu*, Volume II the *wen*; both, at every load-bearing point — in the trained breath of the archer, in the gathered stillness of the calligrapher — pointed to a common root beneath both sides and reserved its treatment for this volume. The root is inner cultivation: *xiulian* 修煉, the patient, stepwise refinement of the whole person, with Qigong 氣功 as its best-known bodily practice today. It is neither a martial art nor a scholarship, but both paths of education presuppose it and draw upon it: the *wu* takes from it the breath and the underlying calm without which no stance and no shot succeeds; the *wen* takes from it the gathered stillness without which no reading and no brushstroke holds. Why a single root can nourish two such different trees is the systematic question of this volume.

From this follows its particular design. Volumes I and II followed a historical skeleton: concept, long historical arc in four chapters, strands, present, plans. This volume is built along conceptual and systematic lines, for its task is not to narrate another institutional history, but to accomplish a clarification that the series as a whole owes: what exactly is cultivation, how does it relate to civil self-formation (*xiushen* 修身) and to modern mindfulness, and why does it lie beneath both sides of the ideal? The argument therefore proceeds in four movements. First, the conceptual family of cultivation is unfolded and ordered (Chapter 2). Then the historical arc — from *daoyin* gymnastics through inner alchemy and Buddhist practice to Qigong, Falun Dafa, and Taijiquan — is traversed in a single, condensed chapter that makes visible the origin of every practice form in use today (Chapter 3). The systematic centerpiece follows: the core clarification of *xiushen*, *xiulian*, and mindfulness and the argument for the root thesis (Chapter 4), followed by a description of the practice itself as a single, coherent field of exercise (Chapter 5). Finally the work turns to the present: to the evidence, which here is the densest in the whole series (Chapter 6), to the honest limits (Chapter 7), and to practice in modern life with design principles, three plans, and a twelve-week progression (Chapters 8 and 9). A conclusion closes the volume and the series (Chapter 10). Figure 1 gives an advance overview of the historical arc that Chapter 3 unfolds.

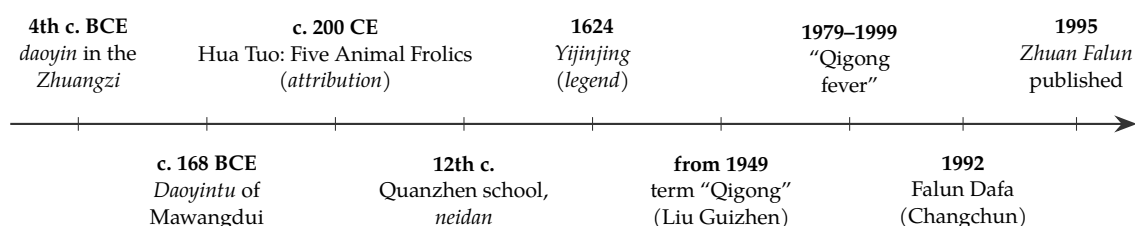


Figure 1: The historical arc of inner cultivation (timeline not to scale; attributions and legends marked as such)

A word on tone is also warranted here in advance, for nowhere in the series is it more necessary than in this field, on which advertising and polemic have outbid one another for decades.

⁸ Cf. Strain, Tessa et al.: *National, regional, and global trends in insufficient physical activity among adults from 2000 to 2022. A pooled analysis of 507 population-based surveys with 5.7 million participants*, in: *The Lancet Global Health* 12/8 (2024); World Health Organization: *Physical activity. Fact sheet*, Geneva 2024.

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2. The Conceptual Family of Cultivation

2.1 Xiu and lian: tending and refining

The English rendering “cultivation” conceals that the Chinese word is joined from two images, each of which contains its own pedagogy. *Xiu* 修 means “to tend, repair, put in order, discipline oneself”; it is the same verb used for maintaining a house or repairing a road, and it carries the notion of a constant, repeated, never-completed care. *Lian* 煉 means “to smelt, refine, temper in fire”; it derives from metallurgy and alchemy and carries the notion of a transformation under heat and pressure, in which a raw material passes into a nobler state.⁹ Taken together, *xiulian* 修煉 designates the patient, stepwise refinement of body and mind toward a higher state: not the accumulation of skill, but the transformation of the person. Already the formation of the word thus contains the two features that this series has singled out as the tradition’s pedagogical legacy — the daily small tending (*xiu*) and the slow, deep transformation (*lian*) —, and it contains, thirdly, a claim that goes beyond any gymnastics: what is refined is not the body alone, but the whole person including its moral nature.

2.2 Xiulian, xiuzhen, xiuxing: the spiritual paths

Within China’s spiritual traditions, the term appears in several closely related forms. *Xiulian* 修煉 is the most general: it encompasses both Daoist and Buddhist cultivation and is still used today by living cultivation paths as a self-designation. *Xiuzhen* 修真, “to cultivate truth” or “to perfect the true,” is the classical Daoist form; it aims at a return to the original, true state of the human being and, in the older language, at immortality.¹⁰ *Xiuxing* 修行, “to cultivate practice/conduct,” is the form current in Buddhism: the steady meditative and moral practice that gradually transforms consciousness, structured into morality, concentration, and wisdom.¹¹ What all three forms share, and what distinguishes them from mere training, is this: the bodily exercises — breath, movement, sitting — are vehicles of refinement, not its purpose; the measure of progress is the transformation of the person, first of her moral nature, and only in second place her well-being.

This ranking is no pious addition, but the defining feature of the cultivation tradition, and it recurs in all its manifestations, from inner alchemy, which places the refinement of *shen* 神 above that of the body, to the living cultivation paths of the present, which explicitly place the refinement of moral nature (*xinxing* 心性) above their exercises (Chapter 3.6). Whoever reduces the tradition to its health effects has therefore not understood it — no more than someone has understood archery who counts only the hit rate. The health effects are real and measurable (Chapter 6); but they are, in the tradition’s self-understanding, accompanying phenomena of a path whose goal is the person.

⁹ On the conceptual family *xiu/lian* and its alchemical origin cf. Kohn (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation*; Komjathy: *Cultivating Perfection*; further Volume I, Chapter 2.3.

¹⁰ Cf. Komjathy: *Cultivating Perfection*, on the terminology of the early Quanzhen school; Kohn (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation*.

¹¹ On the threefold Buddhist path of practice (*śīla, samādhi, prajñā*) cf. Gethin: *The Foundations of Buddhism*, chaps. 7–8.

2.3 Xiushen: the moral, this-worldly twin

To be distinguished from *xiulian* is the Confucian *xiushen* 修身, “to cultivate one’s own person,” which Volume II presented as the core and root of civil education. The *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) makes it the foundation of all order: from the Son of Heaven down to the common man, the cultivation of one’s own person is held to be the root on which family, state, and world order rest.¹² Both terms share the verb *xiu* and with it the pedagogy of daily, patient self-formation; they differ in aim and horizon. *Xiushen* is this-worldly and moral: it aims at character in relation to family, community, and office and remains entirely within the Confucian world of ritual and scholarship. *Xiulian* is spiritual: it aims at the refinement and transformation of the whole person beyond the moral — at health and long life in the older forms, at perfection and salvation in the religious ones — and it works toward this directly with the body: with breath, movement, posture, and stillness. The two are twins, not rivals; the core clarification in Chapter 4 will show that it is precisely their interplay — the moral formation of *xiushen*, carried by the bodily-mental groundedness of *xiulian* — that the tradition intended for the complete person.

2.4 Qi, yangsheng, and gongfu: the working concepts of the practice

Three further terms belong to this volume’s working vocabulary. The first is *qi* 氣, usually rendered as “breath, vital force, vital energy”: the central concept of Chinese bodily and natural philosophy, which unites breathing, vitality, and the fine stirrings of well-being in a single word. This work uses it, as the sources use it, as a concept of traditional self- and world-description, and does not translate it into physiological claims; where modern research is drawn upon, it speaks of breathing, balance, and attention, not of measured *qi*.¹³ The second is *yangsheng* 養生, “nourishing life”: the collective name for traditional health care — exercise, breath, diet, moderation in all things — under which the cultivation practices were transmitted through the centuries wherever they were not religiously framed.¹⁴ The third is *gongfu* 功夫 itself, which Volume I introduced as “skill acquired through persistent effort over time”: in the cultivation traditions, no less than in the martial arts, it denotes invested, patient practice time — a quiet hint, in the language itself, that martial art and cultivation, *wu* and root, stem from the same concept of practice.

This orders the conceptual field: *xiulian* as the spiritual refinement of the person (with the forms *xiuzhen* and *xiuxing*), *xiushen* as its moral, this-worldly twin, *yangsheng* as its everyday health-related shape, *qi* as the concept in which the tradition thinks the object of practice, and *gongfu* as the measure of invested time. The historical arc that follows shows how these concepts, over two thousand years, became an unbroken line of practice.

3. The Historical Arc: from daoyin to Modern Qigong

This single chapter accomplishes what Volumes I and II each needed four chapters for, and it may do so because the cultivation tradition possesses no institutional history in the sense of examinations and academies: its history is the history of practices and their interpretations. The arc is therefore told along the practice forms still exercised today, and for each, what is find, what is text, and what is legend is distinguished.

¹² *Daxue* 大學, chap. 1; cf. Volume II, Chapter 2.3.

¹³ On the concept of *qi* in self-cultivation cf. Kohn (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation*; on the earliest medical conceptual world Harper: *Early Chinese Medical Literature*.

¹⁴ On the *yangsheng* tradition cf. Kohn: *Chinese Healing Exercises*.

3.1 Daoyin: Zhuangzi, Mawangdui, and the attribution to Hua Tuo

The earliest tangible shape of cultivation practice is *daoyin* 導引, “guiding and pulling”: stretching, bending, and breathing exercises, often in imitation of animals. The earliest textual mention appears in the *Zhuangzi* (fourth century BCE), and, tellingly, it is a mocking one: the chapter *Keyi* 刻意 describes people who “blow and pant, exhale and inhale, stretch like the bear and crane like the bird,” and holds against them that the true sage achieves the same without effort.¹⁵ That such exercises were already being methodically, therapeutically, and lay-accessibly practiced by the second century BCE is proven by the *Daoyintu* of Mawangdui described in the introduction, together with the medical manuscripts of the same tomb, which contain breathing techniques (*tuna* 吐納, “expelling and taking in”) and exercise instructions.¹⁶ Toward the end of the Han period, the physician Hua Tuo 華佗 (c. 140–208 CE) is credited with creating the “Five Animal Frolics” (*Wuqinxi* 五禽戲), a sequence in imitation of tiger, deer, bear, ape, and bird. Source-critically it must be noted: the attribution stands in the official historiography, but we possess no exercise description stemming from Hua Tuo himself; the Five Animal Frolics practiced today are later reconstructions under an old name.¹⁷ For the architecture of the series, this section is the cornerstone: the cultivation lineage is here documented as older than any documented martial-arts system (Volume I dates these to the Ming period) and older than the examination system (Volume II dates this to the Sui and Tang). The root is, chronologically too, truly the root.

3.2 Inner Alchemy: neidan, jing–qi–shen, and the Quanzhen School

Cultivation received its most densely developed theoretical form in Daoist inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), systematized from the Song period onward and organized monastically in the Quanzhen school 全真, founded in the twelfth century.¹⁸ Outer alchemy had sought the elixir of immortality in the crucible; inner alchemy relocated the crucible into the practitioner’s body. There the “three treasures” — *jing* 精 (vital essence), *qi* 氣 (vital breath), and *shen* 神 (spirit) — are refined in an ordered sequence: “refine *jing* into *qi*, refine *qi* into *shen*, refine *shen* and return to emptiness.”¹⁹ Two features of this model persist in the tradition to this day. First, staging: cultivation is an ordered path with stations, not a single experience; progress unfolds over years and in a spiral, in which the same exercises recur at a higher stage. Second, the precedence of the inner: the refinement of the spirit and of moral disposition stands above that of the body, and the Quanzhen school explicitly demanded both of its adepts — quiet sitting practice and active virtue in daily life.²⁰ It is the same ranking — character over technique — that Volume I described in *wude* 武德 and Volume II in the *junzi* ideal; it is, as Chapter 4 will show, no coincidence, but the signature of the common root.

¹⁵ *Zhuangzi* 莊子, chap. 15 (*Keyi* 刻意); cf. Kohn: *Chinese Healing Exercises*; Harper: *Early Chinese Medical Literature*. The *Zhuangzi*’s polemic presupposes that the practice was widespread and recognizable in its time.

¹⁶ Harper: *Early Chinese Medical Literature*; on the *Daoyintu* further Volume I, Chapter 4.4. The 1973 find precedes any later standardization of the tradition by centuries and is therefore the Archimedean point of any source-critical account.

¹⁷ Cf. Volume I, Chapter 4.4, with the references given there; on the transmission history of *daoyin* Kohn: *Chinese Healing Exercises*.

¹⁸ Komjathy: *Cultivating Perfection*; Kohn (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation*. The Quanzhen school (“Complete Perfection”) was founded by Wang Zhe 王喆 (1113–1170) and remains to this day one of the two major Daoist orders.

¹⁹ On the sequence *lian jing hua qi* – *lian qi hua shen* – *lian shen huan xu* cf. Komjathy: *Cultivating Perfection*; further Volume I, Chapter 2.3.

²⁰ Komjathy: *Cultivating Perfection*, on the duality of “inner” practice and everyday virtue-practice in the early Quanzhen community.

3.3 Buddhist Practice: *xiuxing* and Silent Sitting

With Buddhism, in the first centuries CE, a fully developed path of practice came to China, whose term *xiuxing* 修行 permanently shaped the Chinese language of cultivation. The Buddhist path classically divides practice into morality (*śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*): moral conduct is the precondition of meditative concentration, and both carry liberating insight.²¹ In China this path merged with native traditions into that characteristic form which the Chan school 禪 cultivated in silent sitting (*zuochan* 坐禪) and which reached beyond the monasteries into lay life. For this volume two points are essential. First, from Buddhist practice-teaching comes the clearest formulation of what distinguishes all cultivation from mere training: that concentration of mind does not flourish without a moral foundation — an insight that modern, secularized mindfulness practice tacitly presupposes and rarely names (Chapter 4.2). Second, Buddhist sitting meditation is the historical main source of the still form of practice that, alongside the moving one (*daoyin*, Qigong, Taijiquan), forms the second pillar of the practice (Chapter 5). It should be noted, source-critically, that the popular link between the Shaolin monastery and an exercise system founded by Bodhidharma is legend; Volume I treated it in connection with the martial arts, and it recurs in this volume in the form of the *Yijinjing* legend (Chapter 3.4).

3.4 Yangsheng Sequences of the Ming and Qing Periods: *Baduanjin* and the *Yijinjing* Legend

Between the Song period and the end of the empire, cultivation practice was increasingly transmitted in compact, named exercise sequences that circulated in the *yangsheng* literature. The best known is the *Baduanjin* 八段錦, the “Eight Brocades”: a sequence of eight stretching and breathing exercises textually attested since the Song period and, to this day, among the most widely practiced Qigong forms. The widespread attribution to the Song general Yue Fei 岳飛 is legend — it follows the same pattern of retrospective heroic attribution that Volume I described for the martial-arts styles.²² The most instructive example of the pattern is the *Yijinjing* 易筋經 (“Classic of Muscle/Tendon Change”): the oldest surviving version dates from 1624 and carries prefaces that invoke Bodhidharma and the Tang period; critical research since Tang Hao has proven these prefaces to be forgeries — the text is a work of the late Ming period that claimed for itself a venerable age.²³ Source-critically the finding is doubly instructive: it shows how young some “ancient” sequences are — and, at the same time, that the practice itself, the methodical stretching and breathing, is truly two millennia older than its legends, as finds such as Mawangdui show. The tradition is genuine; only its labels are often invented. For teachers, this is perhaps the most important lesson of this chapter: one can pass on the exercises in good conscience as ancient heritage without telling a single untenable founding story.

3.5 The Twentieth Century: the Invention of Qigong and the Qigong Fever

The collective name under which the world knows these practices today is young. *Qigong* 氣功 as an overarching, technical term was established only from 1949, when the official Liu Guizhen 劉貴珍 organized transmitted breath and exercise practices, to which he attributed his own re-

²¹ Gethin: *The Foundations of Buddhism*, chaps. 7–8.

²² On the textual history of the *Baduanjin* and on the formation of the legend cf. Kohn: *Chinese Healing Exercises*.

²³ Shahar: *The Shaolin Monastery*, with the analysis of the forged prefaces; on Tang Hao’s role Volume I, prefatory note.

covery, into a clinical therapy taught in state sanatoria — first in Tangshan, then in Beidaihe.²⁴ This is a remarkable process: a cultivation tradition grown over two millennia, embedded in religion, was renamed and reframed as a health technique in order to be able to persist under altered political conditions. The series has described this pattern twice — the transformation of the martial arts into sport wushu (Volume I, Chapter 6.4) and the transformation of scholarly education in the aftermath of the twentieth century (Volume II, Chapter 6.4) —, and it has drawn from this its recurring lesson: institutions remold tradition according to their purposes; what is worth preserving and transmissible is the pedagogy, not the institution.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Qigong, so reframed, experienced a mass movement without precedent. In the years between roughly 1979 and 1999 — Palmer dates the peak to 1985 through 1996 — according to the contemporary estimates he reports, well over a hundred million people at times practiced in parks, workplaces, and stadiums; charismatic masters filled halls, state research institutes investigated “extraordinary abilities,” and high-ranking cadres promoted the movement as a genuinely Chinese science of the human being.²⁵ This “Qigong fever” (*qigong re* 氣功熱) is decisive for the conceptual history: it made cultivation practice the largest bodily-spiritual movement of modern Chinese history, and it posed anew the old question that the *Yijing*’s prefaces had already sought to answer — what these exercises actually are: gymnastics, medicine, science, or path. From the mid-1990s, state sponsorship cooled, and after 1999 the large networks were suppressed; the tradition persisted — in the small, health-framed forms within the country itself and in the cultivation paths carried on outside China.²⁶ The reader of the series recognizes the pattern: Volume I told of the First Emperor’s confiscation of weapons, Volume II of the burning of the books — the tension between a practice that forms people and a state that both needs and fears formed people belongs to the history of all three volumes.

3.6 Falun Dafa: Cultivation in the Full Sense in the Present

Within this movement, on 13 May 1992, a school stepped into public view in Changchun that Volumes I and II already named as the best-known contemporary example of living cultivation and whose thorough treatment this volume owes: Falun Dafa 法輪大法, taught by Li Hongzhi 李洪志 (also Falun Gong 法輪功).²⁷ Externally, its beginnings resembled those of other Qigong schools of those years: public lecture series, practice groups in parks, word-of-mouth transmission. In substance, however, it differed from the outset, and precisely in the direction that this chapter has worked out as the classical signature of cultivation: Falun Dafa understands itself not as a health technique, but as a path of cultivation in the full sense of *xiulian* — the five exercises, four moving and one still sitting meditation, count as a support; the actual matter is the refinement of moral nature, *xinxing* 心性.²⁸ David Ownby, who studied the movement for years at first hand, explicitly places it within the long, venerable history of Chinese cultivation traditions, whose motifs — the union of moral and bodily refinement, the staging of the path,

²⁴ Palmer: *Qigong Fever*, chap. 1. Palmer traces how the term *qigong* was chosen as a secular-medical framing that detached the practices from their religious origin and thereby made them teachable under the new state.

²⁵ Palmer: *Qigong Fever*, esp. chaps. 2–6, on the chronology, on the estimates of participant numbers, and on the role of scientific and political sponsors.

²⁶ Palmer: *Qigong Fever*, chaps. 8–9.

²⁷ On the chronology Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*; Penny: *The Religion of Falun Gong*. Both works are the standard religious-studies accounts on which this section relies throughout.

²⁸ Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, esp. chap. 4; Penny: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, chaps. 4–5; Zhuan Falun, Lecture 1.

practice in daily life rather than in the monastery — carry it into the present.²⁹

The self-understanding can be summarized briefly and without interpretation from the main scripture, the *Zhuan Falun* 轉法輪, published in January 1995. According to it, the highest measure of the cosmos is the unity of *zhen* 真 (truthfulness), *shan* 善 (compassion, benevolence), and *ren* 忍 (forbearance, tolerance); cultivation means aligning one's own thought, speech, and action in ordinary life — in family, work, and conflict — step by step with these three values, while examining one's own heart wherever it is put to the test.³⁰ The practitioner remains in his occupation, starts a family, raises children; what is demanded is not withdrawal, but refinement in the midst of everyday life — the classical lay form of cultivation that this volume has traced from the *Daoyintu* through the *yangsheng* literature to this point. Instruction was and is given free of charge; the exercises are passed on in open groups in parks and squares, without membership and without cult buildings.³¹ In the 1990s the practice spread with extraordinary speed; contemporary estimates, including official Chinese ones, put the number of practitioners toward the end of the decade at several tens of millions.³²

For the conceptual work of this volume, Falun Dafa is instructive for three reasons. First, it shows the three forms of the second chapter in living unity: the daily bodily practice (*daoyin* heritage), the staging of the path (*neidan* heritage), and the precedence of moral refinement (the shared heritage of *xiuxing* and *xiushen*) — in other words, it unites precisely the moral-spiritual with bodily practice, and is thereby the most complete widely practiced form of classical *xiulian* today. Second, it answers the question of the Qigong fever — gymnastics, medicine, or path? — unambiguously in the sense of the old tradition: path. Third, it upholds this volume's distinction from mere health practice even in its own vocabulary: progress is measured by *xinxing*, not by the number of practice hours — “cultivation first, exercise as support.” The further history belongs to documented contemporary history: on 20 July 1999 the leadership of the People's Republic banned the practice and began a persecution that continues to this day; practitioners responded predominantly with peaceful appeals, and the practice has since been carried on in China under conditions of persecution and outside China in a worldwide community.³³ With this, what Volume I showed at the confiscation of weapons and Volume II at the burning of the books is repeated at the root; and it confirms the series' second recurring lesson: a living tradition can only be preserved by being practiced — cultivation lives on wherever people practice it.

3.7 Taijiquan as Health Cultivation: the Return to daoyin Kinship

The last station of the arc is at the same time the redemption of a promise from Volume I. Taijiquan 太極拳 arose historically as a combative family system of the Qing period (Volume I, Chapter 6.2); its worldwide rise in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, took place almost exclusively as a slow, breath-led, health-oriented movement practice — fostered by simplified short forms created within the state sport of the People's Republic, and carried by a

²⁹ Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, chaps. 1–2, with the placement within the history of cultivation and of popular-religious “redemptive societies.”

³⁰ *Zhuan Falun*, esp. Lectures 1 and 4; on the analysis Penny: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, chap. 4. The work stood on the bestseller lists of the *Beijing Youth Daily* in 1996.

³¹ Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, chap. 4, on the organizational form; Penny: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, chap. 2.

³² Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, chap. 4, with a discussion of the estimates (a commonly cited official figure is around seventy million).

³³ On the persecution from 20 July 1999 as a documented historical fact cf. Ownby: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, chaps. 6–7; Penny: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, chap. 1; Palmer: *Qigong Fever*, chap. 9.

worldwide reception that seeks in Taijiquan not a martial art, but a cultivation.³⁴ The series assigns this form of Taijiquan — by function, not by name — to inner cultivation: in its slow, health-oriented practice form, Taijiquan is a moving cultivation practice in direct *daoyin* kinship, and its shift from combat to cultivation is no devaluation, but a return to the vicinity of its oldest relatives. Where it is genuinely practiced as a martial art with partner work and application, it belongs, by contrast, to the kung-fu strand of the first volume. This assignment bears practical fruit: the densest clinical evidence of the entire field treated by this series concerns exactly this cultivating form of Taijiquan, and Volume I expressly reserved its treatment for this volume (Volume I, Chapter 9.1). Chapter 6 redeems this promise.

4. The Core Clarification: *xiushen*, *xiulian*, and Modern Mindfulness

4.1 *Xiushen* and *xiulian*: two cultivations, one pedagogy

The series has built up this distinction step by step; here it is systematically summarized. *Xiushen* and *xiulian* share the verb of tending and with it the pedagogy: daily, patient, year-on-year sustained practice in small steps that slowly transforms the person rather than quickly filling him. They differ in aim, horizon, and means. The *xiushen* of the second volume is the moral, this-worldly self-formation of Confucianism: its horizon is the order of family, community, and state; its means is the shaping of conduct through ritual, reading, and self-examination; its measure is the *junzi* 君子, the noble in dealing with others. The *xiulian* of this volume is the spiritual refinement of the Daoist-Buddhist traditions: its horizon reaches beyond the moral to the transformation and perfection of the whole person; its means is direct work with the body — breath, movement, posture, stillness —; its measure is refinement itself, in the classical language the stages of the path, in the language of the living cultivation paths the *xinxing*. Both cultivations depend on one another: moral formation needs the bodily and attentional groundedness that only practice supplies; bodily-mental practice needs the moral ranking that keeps it from degenerating into mere technique or self-regard. The tradition has never understood this mutual dependence as competition, but as a division of labor — and it is precisely this division of labor that constitutes the root beneath both sides of the series.

4.2 Modern Mindfulness: the Secularized Neighbor

No comparison suggests itself to today's reader more readily than that with mindfulness, which since the 1980s has migrated from Buddhist sources into medicine and everyday culture — decisively mediated by the program of “mindfulness-based stress reduction” (MBSR), founded in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.³⁵ The kinship is real, not a surface resemblance: mindfulness practice, too, is daily, small, formally practiced gathering of attention on breath and body, and its descent from Buddhist *xiuxing* is openly acknowledged. The difference lies in what was deliberately left behind in the translation into secular medicine: the ethical-spiritual frame. The classical teaching of practice, Buddhist as much as Daoist, binds concentration to morality and to a goal beyond well-being; secular mindfulness releases concentration from this bond and offers it as a technique of stress reduction. This is legitimate as a medical decision and has brought the practice to millions of people whom a religious frame

³⁴ On its origin as a family system and on the sporting-health transformation in the twentieth century cf. Lorge, Peter A.: *Chinese Martial Arts. From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge 2012; Volume I, Chapters 6.2 and 6.4.

³⁵ Kabat-Zinn, Jon: *Full Catastrophe Living. Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, New York 1990.

would have kept away. But it is, from the standpoint of the tradition, a halving: what remains is the support without the path — the exercise without the ranking that gave the exercise its meaning.

The empirical balance fits this finding. The authoritative meta-analysis of meditation programs — 47 randomized trials with over 3,500 participants — found moderate improvements for mindfulness programs in anxiety, depression, and pain, and small improvements in stress and quality of life; for behavioral measures such as sleep or weight the evidence was insufficient, and superiority over other active treatments could not be shown.³⁶ That is a solid but modest effect — comparable to that of other established measures, no miracle cure. For this volume, this is a doubly useful reference: it documents that practiced concentration measurably benefits, and it warns at the same time against the exaggeration that this series rejects for each of its practices. What the cultivation tradition offers beyond secular mindfulness is not a stronger technique, but the frame that the latter left behind: the connection of practice with the formation of character and with a community of teachers and practitioners. Whether this frame increases the measurable effects is not documented and is not claimed here; that it gives the practice meaning, direction, and constancy is the tradition's experience, attested over two millennia.

4.3 Why the Root Carries Both Sides

This allows the thesis to be established that carries the architecture of the whole series and that Figure 2 shows: inner cultivation lies not *beside* the *wen* and the *wu* as a third path of education, but *beneath* both as their common root. The argument has three stages. The first is physiological and was developed in Volume I: all martial strands rest on the trained, slow, diaphragmed breath and the associated regulation of arousal — the archer who slows before release, the fighter who keeps composure under pressure, practice the same basic skill of regulating one's own state (Volume I, Chapter 9.5); this basic skill is nowhere trained as directly as in the breath and movement work of cultivation. The second is psychological and was developed in Volume II: all civil strands rest on gathered, still, single-pointed attention — the calligrapher before the first stroke, the player before the stone, the reader in a difficult text practice the same concentration (Volume II, Chapter 9.5); this too is nowhere practiced as purely as in the silent sitting of cultivation. The third stage is the moral one, and it is the deepest: both paths of education place character above technique — the *wude* of the fighter and the *junzi* of the scholar are two expressions of the same ranking —, and this ranking is the signature of the cultivation tradition, which has always measured progress by the refinement of the person and not by the accumulation of skill. Breath, concentration, and ranking: the *wu* draws chiefly the first from the root, the *wen* chiefly the second, and both receive the third — together with the pedagogical principle of daily, transforming practice that carries all the plans of this series.

This root thesis finally explains why this volume is, and may be, the shortest of the series. The root is not a third tree bearing its own branches of strands, institutions, and examinations; it is what nourishes the two trees. Its treatment therefore needs neither four historical chapters nor a static array of four strands, but the clarification of concepts, the origin of the practice forms, and an honest examination of what the exercise offers the person of today. This is exactly what the remaining chapters accomplish.

³⁶ Goyal, Madhav et al.: *Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*, in: *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174/3 (2014), pp. 357–368.

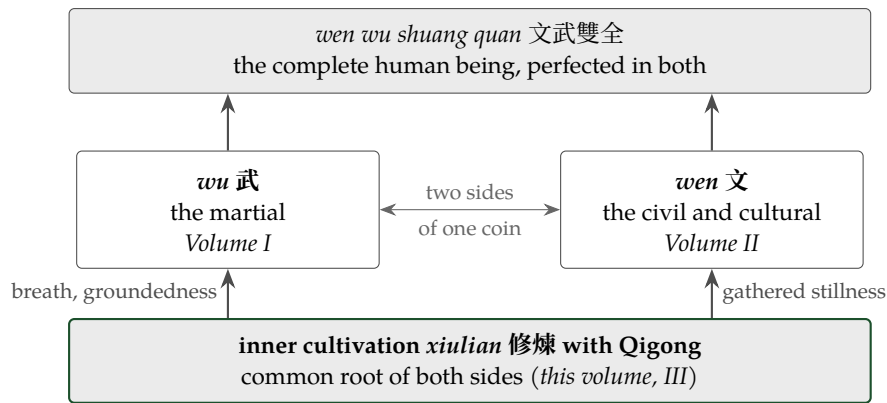


Figure 2: The design of the series, seen from the root: inner cultivation carries both sides of the ideal — to the *wu* it gives breath and groundedness, to the *wen* gathered stillness, to both the ranking of character over technique

5. The Practice: a Single Field of Exercise

Unlike Volumes I and II, this volume does not divide the practice into strands. The decision is substantively grounded: the four strands of *wu* and the four of *wen* are historically separate skills with their own institutions; cultivation, by contrast, is *one* practice exercised in different gestures. Whoever practices the Baduanjin, silent sitting, and slow breathing does not practice three skills, but the same thing three times over in different form: the regulation of one's own state and the gathering of attention within one's own body. The tradition itself has always emphasized this unity — the classical triad reads: regulate the body (*tiao shen* 調身), regulate the breath (*tiao xi* 調息), and regulate the heart/mind (*tiao xin* 調心), and every form of practice is merely a different weighting of these three regulations.³⁷

Three basic gestures suffice to order the entire field. The first is **trained breath**: conscious, slow, diaphragm-led breathing (*tuna*), practiced on its own or as the ground of every other exercise; it is the most immediately effective and best-documented single component (Chapter 6.4) and, at the same time, the heritage that Volume I wove into every martial strand. The second is the **moving form**: the slow, breath-led sequence of movement, from classical *daoyin* through the Baduanjin and the Five Animal Frolics to the Qigong forms of the twentieth century and Taijiquan in its cultivating shape; it combines regulation of state with balance, leg strength, and coordination, and thus carries the main body of clinical evidence (Chapters 6.1 and 6.2). The third is **silent sitting**: motionless concentration — Buddhist as *zuochan*, Daoist as silent sitting (*jingzuo* 靜坐), in the living cultivation paths as sitting meditation — in which attention is held without the support of movement; it is the purest and, at the same time, the most demanding form of the practice. To these three formal gestures is added, as a fourth, informal one, the **field of everyday life**: the cultivation traditions — from the Confucians' *xiushen* through the everyday virtue of Quanzhen monks to the *xinxing* test of Falun Dafa — relocate the actual test into ordinary life: into patience in conflict, honesty in business, forbearance within the family. The formal practice space prepares what everyday life tests.

From this unity follows the practical order that the plans in Chapter 9 implement. The gestures are not “completed” one after another, but combined daily in small measure: a few minutes of breath, a short moving form, a few minutes of stillness — and the resolve to take a concrete

³⁷ On the triad of the “three regulations” as the common denominator of Qigong forms cf. Kohn (ed.): *Daoist Body Cultivation*; Palmer: *Qigong Fever*, chap. 1.

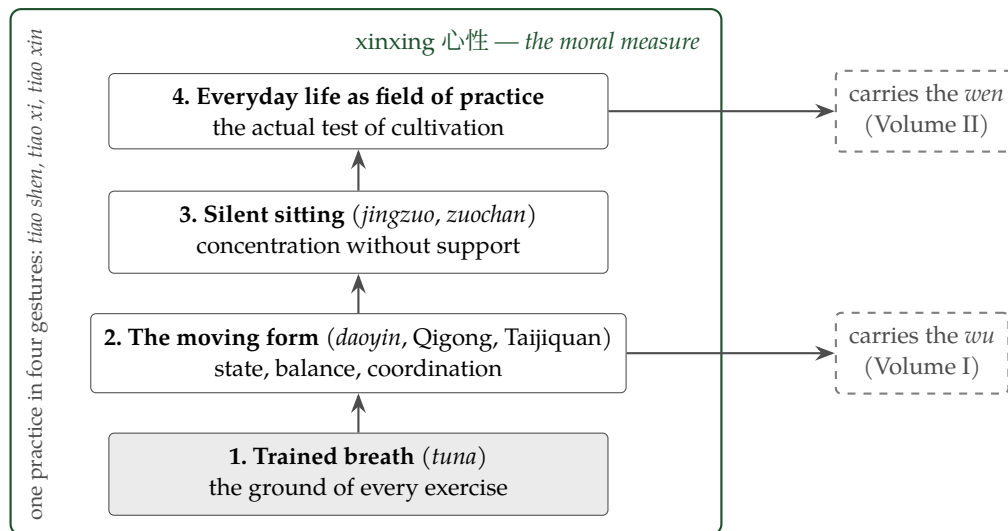


Figure 3: The field of practice of inner cultivation: one practice in four gestures, held by the moral measure and carrying both sides of the series

everyday situation as practice. The staging concerns only the weighting: the beginner starts with breath and the simplest moving form, because both give attention a support; silent sitting grows as concentration becomes capable of bearing it; everyday life is present from the first day. Whoever already practices according to Volume I or II recognizes the points of connection at once: the breathwork is the same that there carries stance, shot, and brushstroke; the moving form supplements martial training with its slow, regenerative side; silent sitting is the preparatory school of gathered attention that the civil arts demand. Half an hour of daily cultivation does not lengthen the plans of Volumes I and II, but makes them more sustainable.

6. The Benefit of a Revival: the Evidence

Volume I announced it and reserved it for this volume: the densest health evidence of the entire field treated by this series, resting on randomized controlled trials and meta-analyses, concerns not the combative and not the civil arts, but the slow, breath-led cultivation practices — foremost Taijiquan in its cultivating form (Volume I, Chapter 9.1). This chapter presents it in descending order of evidential strength and notes the limits in place. To be prefaced is the reading that the whole series maintains: what is documented here are effects of the practice on health, balance, and well-being — not the tradition's own self-understanding, whose actual subject, the refinement of the person, largely escapes measurement (Prefatory Note). The evidence justifies why the practice also benefits one who seeks only health; it is not the reason for which the tradition practiced it.

6.1 Fall Prevention: the Densest Evidence of the Field

Falls are, in old age, one of the most common causes of injury, dependency on care, and death; their prevention is therefore a hard, patient-relevant measure. The Cochrane review on fall prevention through exercise — 108 randomized trials with over 23,000 community-dwelling older people — finds with high certainty that exercise programs reduce the rate of falls by around 23

percent; programs focused on balance and functional exercise reduce it by around 24 percent.³⁸ Within this field, Taijiquan has been examined in a meta-analysis of its own: the meta-analysis by Lomas-Vega and colleagues — ten randomized trials in older and fall-prone adults — finds, with high-quality evidence, that Taijiquan reduces the fall rate relative to other interventions by 43 percent in the short term (under twelve months) and by 13 percent in the long term; for injurious falls, reductions of 50 percent short-term and 28 percent long-term appear, though on a narrower data basis.³⁹ Figure 4 places these figures side by side; it should be noted that the comparison groups and time frames of the two reviews differ, so the bars depict the respective body of studies, not a direct competition.

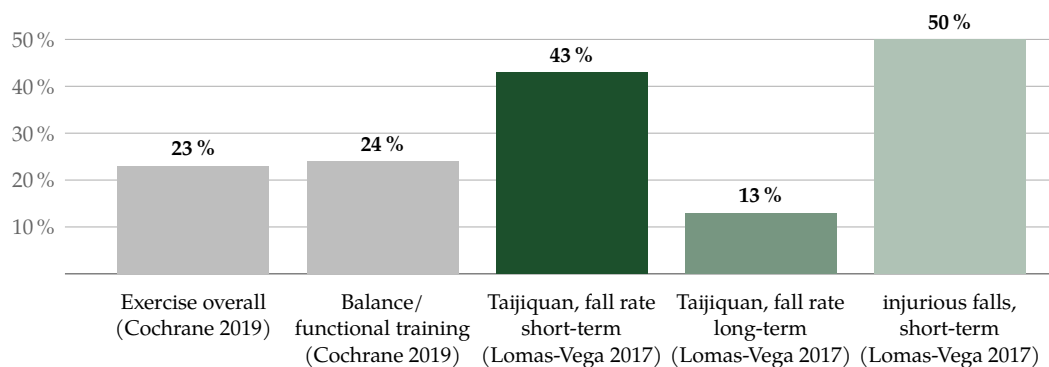


Figure 4: Reduction of fall rate through exercise in older and fall-prone adults, by meta-analysis (Cochrane review: Sherrington et al. 2019; Taijiquan: Lomas-Vega et al. 2017). Different comparison groups and time frames; the bars depict the respective body of studies, not a direct comparison.

These figures deserve a moment's pause, for they are, in the language of this series, remarkable: a five-hundred-year-old movement practice, fed by the cultivation tradition, passes the strictest test known to modern medicine, and does so in its core discipline — the balance of the aging person. The World Health Organization expressly recommends that older adults undertake multicomponent training with an emphasis on balance on three or more days of the week; the slow cultivation forms are among the few practice shapes that fulfill this recommendation completely, gently, and without equipment.⁴⁰

6.2 The Broader Health Evidence on Qigong and Taijiquan

Beyond fall prevention, the body of studies is broad but unevenly dense. The comprehensive review by Jahnke and colleagues evaluated 77 randomized controlled trials on Qigong and Taijiquan jointly — the authors justify the joint evaluation by the substantial congruence of the exercise principles, that is, precisely the *daoyin* kinship that Chapter 3.7 derived historically — and found consistent positive results for bone health, cardiovascular and pulmonary function, balance and fall prevention, quality of life and self-reported efficacy, as well as for anxiety and

³⁸ Sherrington, Catherine et al.: *Exercise for preventing falls in older people living in the community*, in: *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2019/1, CD012424. Exercise overall: rate ratio 0.77 (95% CI 0.71–0.83; 12,981 participants); balance and functional training: 0.76 (0.70–0.81).

³⁹ Lomas-Vega, Rafael / Obrero-Gaitán, Esteban / Molina-Ortega, Francisco J. / Del-Pino-Casado, Rafael: *Tai Chi for Risk of Falls. A Meta-analysis*, in: *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 65/9 (2017), pp. 2037–2043. The interventions lasted 12 to 26 weeks with one to three hours per week.

⁴⁰ Bull, Fiona C. et al.: *World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour*, in: *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54/24 (2020), pp. 1451–1462, recommendations for adults aged 65 and above.

depression.⁴¹ It is honest to add what the authors themselves add: many individual studies are small, comparison groups are inconsistent, blinding is in principle impossible for movement interventions, and for individual endpoints the evidence is preliminary. The honest summary reads: for balance, fall prevention, and functional health in old age the evidence is strong; for well-being, anxiety, and depression moderate and consistent; for further-reaching clinical effects promising but not established. This is — the comparison suggests itself — nearly the mirror image of the evidence situation in Volume I, where the combative practice was well documented for strength and conditioning but thinner for everything else: the two sides of the coin also have complementary strengths empirically.

6.3 Silent Practice, Stress, and Well-Being

For the still gesture of the practice, sitting in concentration, the best available evidence is the meta-analysis by Goyal and colleagues presented in Chapter 4.2: moderate, consistent improvements across many studies in anxiety, depression, and pain through mindfulness-based programs — evidence that can be transferred, with due caution, to the formally related silent practice of the cultivation tradition, since the programs studied (eight weeks, daily formal practice, breath and body focus) are structurally modeled on the traditional practice form.⁴² No more is claimed here, and no more is needed: that regular silent concentration measurably improves well-being suffices as a modern reason to practice it; its true rank, in the tradition, in any case derives not from well-being but from the formation of the person.

6.4 Breath as the Common Mechanism of Action

What physiologically connects the three gestures was developed by Volume I for the martial strands, and it holds here all the more, because cultivation practices the mechanism not incidentally but expressly: slow, diaphragm-led breathing is one of the few voluntary levers by which a human being can act on his autonomic nervous system; it raises vagal tone and heart-rate variability and shifts the organism into a calmer, more strongly regulated state,⁴³ and guided breathwork significantly lowers self-reported stress.⁴⁴ The tradition has described this lever under the name *tuna* since the Mawangdui manuscripts and built it into every one of its forms; modern physiology confirms that it was applying pressure at the right point. For the time-constrained modern practitioner, this is at the same time the most encouraging line of the chapter: even a few minutes of trained breathing carry measurable benefit, and they can be practiced anywhere — there is no lower threshold into the entire field treated by this series.

7. Challenges and Honest Limits

7.1 Limits of the Evidence

The first limit is that of the research just presented itself. The body of studies on cultivation practices is the densest in the series, but it is not flawless: many individual studies are small,

⁴¹ Jahnke, Roger / Larkey, Linda / Rogers, Carol / Etner, Jennifer / Lin, Fang: *A Comprehensive Review of Health Benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi*, in: *American Journal of Health Promotion* 24/6 (2010), pp. e1–e25.

⁴² Goyal et al.: *Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being*, pp. 357–368 (citation in Chapter 4.2). The transfer is a reasoned analogy, not a direct measurement of the traditional practice; this is expressly noted.

⁴³ Zaccaro, Andrea et al.: *How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life. A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing*, in: *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12 (2018), article 353.

⁴⁴ Fincham, Guy W. et al.: *Effect of Breathwork on Stress and Mental Health. A Meta-Analysis of Randomised-Controlled Trials*, in: *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023), article 432 (12 randomized trials, n = 785).

active comparison groups are often lacking, participants cannot be blinded, self-reported endpoints are susceptible to expectation effects, and publication bias is a well-known problem of both movement and meditation research. Claims of superiority — that cultivation works better than other exercise or replaces treatments — are not borne out by the evidence, and this work does not make them. In addition there is a peculiarity that must be honestly named: the slow forms are predominantly light- to moderate-intensity exercise. Whoever only sits still and practices slowly does not automatically meet the World Health Organization's activity target; cultivation supplements strengthening and endurance movement — such as that of Volume I's plans — it does not replace it. And finally, for all health-related statements of this volume, the self-evident medical limit applies: the practice is health maintenance and rehabilitation, not a substitute for treatment in serious illness.

7.2 The Marketplace of Promises

The second limit is the same one that Volumes I and II described as a crisis of transmission, but here in its sharpest form, for nowhere is the gap between what can be sold and what can be documented greater than in the field of inner practice. The market offers miracle cures, ancient secret knowledge, and certified mastery in weekend courses; the history of this volume has shown that already the Ming period knew forged prefaces, and that criticism of legend — from Tang Hao to present-day research — belongs to the tradition itself. The source-critical skepticism that this series applies to history and evidence is therefore also the best consumer rule: whoever honestly names origin, ability, and limits deserves trust; whoever promises the ancient, the secret, the fast, or healing does not. It should be expressly stated that this rule does not strike the serious bearers of the tradition, but protects them: precisely because there exists a living, honest transmission — taught free of charge or modestly in associations, communities, and cultivation paths — it is worth distinguishing it from the marketplace of promises.

7.3 The Question of the Teacher and the Danger of Self-Deception

The third limit is pedagogical. Silent and slow practice is more in need of correction than it appears: postural errors, shallow chest breathing under the appearance of abdominal breathing, tension under the appearance of relaxation — all of this creeps in and is noticed last by the practitioner himself. What Volume I established for the martial arts holds undiminished: wherever possible, regular contact with a genuine teacher belongs in every program, for the embodied error is recognized only from outside. To this is added a danger that the cultivation traditions themselves have named most clearly: that the practice becomes a flight — stillness as avoidance, inwardness as excuse. The classical answer is the relocation of the test into everyday life (Chapter 5): a cultivation that succeeds in the practice room and fails within the family is, by the tradition's own standard — from the *xiushen* of the *Great Learning* to the *xinxing* measure of the living paths — no cultivation at all. This built-in grounding in reality is the tradition's best protection against its own caricature.

7.4 The Unavoidable Effort: Constancy Rather Than Hours

The fourth limit is milder in this volume than in its sister volumes, but it is unavoidable. Cultivation demands fewer hours than the martial and fewer books than the civil program; its currency is not the number of hours, but constancy. Ten minutes daily over years form; three hours on the first of January do not. Precisely here lies, for the modern adult, both comfort and hardship: comfort, because no one need fail on account of time — the minimal dose of this volume fits into any day —; hardship, because the daily return is a discipline of its own kind that no motivation

of the first weeks replaces. The tradition knew this and built its answer into the practice: the fixed daily ritual, the community of practitioners, the teacher who asks after one. The plans of the following chapter take over all three supports, as far as a modern life allows.

8. A Model of Integration: Design Principles

The following plans are not arbitrary; they are derived from the same six principles that Volumes I and II developed, here applied to the particular nature of silent and slow practice. Since cultivation is the common root, its principles also serve as the hinge by which the plans of all three volumes join into one life.

The first principle is the minimal effective dose. For cultivation it is smaller than anywhere else in the series: even a few minutes of trained breathing carry measurable benefit (Chapter 6.4), and the meta-analytically examined Taijiquan programs made do with one to three hours a week (Chapter 6.1). The lower threshold of this volume is around twenty daily minutes — a bar that fits into any working life. At the same time, the honest counter-reckoning of Chapter 7.1 applies: slow practice supplements the World Health Organization's activity target, it does not fulfill it alone; whoever practices only this volume should set walking, strengthening, or the plans of Volume I alongside it.

The second principle is daily ritual plus weekly depth. Nowhere is it to be taken as literally as here, for it is the direct practical form of the concept *xiulian* itself: the daily small tending (*xiu*), interspersed with a longer weekly session — where possible in a group or course — in which correction, deepening, and communal practice take place (*lian*). A quarter-hour kept up every morning over years teaches more than any intensive course.

The third principle is staging, here as weighting rather than as sequence: the beginner weights breath and the simplest moving form, because both give attention a support; silent sitting grows with the capacity of concentration to bear it; everyday life as a field of practice is present from the first day (Chapter 5). Nothing is skipped, but nothing is forced.

The fourth principle is progress without competition, and for cultivation it is no concession to modernity but the core of the matter: the classical measure is the transformation of the practitioner — in the language of the living paths, *xinxing* —, and the usable modern measures are private and quiet: the number of practice days in a week, the calm of the breath, the minutes of gathered sitting, patience in yesterday's conflict. Chapter 9.4 turns this into a checkable but competition-free progression.

The fifth principle is verified transmission. It takes over the consumer rule from Chapter 7.2 — trust is deserved by whoever honestly names origin, ability, and limits — and the teacher rule from Chapter 7.3: at least one regular, corrective session with a genuine teacher, wherever one is reachable. The forms of this volume — Baduanjin, Taijiquan short forms, silent sitting — are taught in many places, free of charge or modestly, in associations, community colleges, and cultivation communities; there is no shortage of accessible, honest transmission.

The sixth principle is the ethical frame, and at the root it is not a frame among others, but the center: cultivation that does not aim at character is, by the self-understanding of all the traditions presented in this volume, no cultivation at all. In practice this means: the exercise is bound to a resolve for the day, and the weekly review asks first about the patience, honesty, and forbearance of the past week and only then about the minutes practiced. In this way the ranking that this volume has traced from the *Great Learning* to the *Zhuan Falun* is preserved: character over technique.

9. Sample Exercise Plans for Modern Working Life

The following three plans apply the principles to the same three life situations for which Volumes I and II designed their plans; whoever already practices according to those finds, at the end of each plan, a note on how to connect them. All plans presuppose nothing but a quiet corner of two square meters, comfortable clothing, and — where possible — a weekly group or course session; as the moving form, the Baduanjin or a Taijiquan short form can be used throughout, as the still form any straight, quiet sitting. The times are deliberately set conservatively, so that the plans survive contact with a full week.

9.1 Plan A: The Working Person (approx. 3 to 3.5 hours per week)

This plan puts the daily twenty-minute ritual first — most effective in the morning, before the first screen — and concentrates the depth on the weekend.

Table 1: Plan A for the working person

Day	Practice	Gesture	Time
Mon	Breathwork while sitting; followed by moving short form	breath, moving form	20 min.
Tue	Breathwork; silent sitting	breath, silent sitting	20 min.
Wed	Complete moving form; check daily resolve	moving form, everyday life	20 min.
Thu	Breathwork; silent sitting	breath, silent sitting	20 min.
Fri	Moving form; short weekly review (<i>xinxing</i> first)	moving form, everyday life	20 min.
Sat	Longer session: course or group class (Taijiquan/Qigong), otherwise own extended form	moving form, correction	60 min.
Sun	Silent sitting in quiet; moving form outdoors	silent sitting, moving form	35 min.

The weekly total amounts to around 3 hours 15 minutes. The plan fully meets the balance recommendation for older adults (multicomponent exercise on three or more days); it contributes only partially to the general WHO activity target and should therefore stand alongside walking, cycling, or the plans of Volume I, not in their place. Connection with the series: whoever practices Plan A from Volume I replaces its breath and loosening components with the morning session of this plan and thereby gains both without additional time.

9.2 Plan B: The Committed Practitioner (approx. 6 to 6.5 hours per week)

This plan deepens all four gestures and suits practitioners who want to make cultivation the backbone of their week.

Table 2: Plan B for the committed practitioner

Day	Practice	Gesture	Time
Mon–Fri	Morning: breathwork, moving form, silent sitting (15 + 15 + 15); daily resolve	all four gestures	45 min. daily
Sat	Group or course session plus own deepening (long form, corrective work)	moving form, correction	90 min.
Sun	Long silent session; moving form outdoors; weekly review	silent sitting, everyday life	60 min.

The weekly total amounts to around 6 hours 15 minutes (five times 45 minutes, plus 90 and

60 minutes at the weekend). Connection with the series: this plan can be combined fully with Plan A of Volume I or Volume II; the morning session then carries both as the common root.

9.3 Plan C: Family or Shift Work (Fragmented Time)

Where no fixed daily rhythm exists, the module menu replaces the ritual: small, self-contained units that fit into any gap. Rule: the breath module daily and at least one further module; the weekly total follows of its own accord.

Table 3: Plan C: module menu for fragmented time

Module	Content	Time
Breath	Slow diaphragmatic breathing while sitting or standing; possible anywhere	5 min.
Moving form	Baduanjin or section of a Taijiquan short form	12 min.
Silent sitting	Straight, quiet sitting with breath focus	10 min.
Long form	Complete moving form at leisure, outdoors where possible	20 min.
Everyday re-solve	Set a resolve in the morning, review in the evening (<i>xinxing</i> first)	3 min.

With the basic rule (breath plus one module daily), a weekly total of at least around one and a half to two hours results; in good weeks it grows through the modules, not through the ambition. Connection with the series: the modules fit into the gap-plans C of Volumes I and II and share their principle that the constancy of the small unit beats any heroic catch-up.

9.4 A Twelve-Week Progression and Its Adaptation

The progression leads in twelve weeks from the first breath to self-sustaining practice; it is calculated for Plan A and scaled proportionally for B and C. Its measures are private and competition-free; no one but the practitioner reads them.

Table 4: Twelve-week progression (calculated for Plan A)

Weeks	Focus	Private measures (at the end of the block)
1-4	Breath and first moving form: anchor the daily session; sitting brief (5 min.); introduce the daily resolve	Practiced on at least five days of the week; the breathwork noticeably slower; the short form without reference
5-8	Complete the moving form; extend sitting to 10-15 min.; take up a weekly course or group session	Form complete and calm; 10 min. sitting without restlessness; first correction received from a teacher
9-12	Integration: sitting up to 20 min.; take everyday life seriously as a field of practice; fixed weekly review	Practiced on six days; 15-20 min. gathered sitting; in review, one concrete conflict borne more patiently than before

After the twelfth week, no new stage begins, but the spiral: the same gestures, practiced more deeply. Whoever lapses re-enters one block-stage lower and counts the lapse not as fault, but as weather. Adjustment upward proceeds through the duration of sitting and the care of the form, never through ambition in speed — there is nothing to be won in this volume except constancy itself.

10. Conclusion

The present work has asked what inner cultivation — *xiulian*, with Qigong as its best-known bodily practice — is, where it comes from, and what it honestly has to offer the modern person. It has done so as the third and shortest volume of a series whose architecture it brings to completion: Volume I unfolded the *wu*, Volume II the *wen*, and this volume has presented the root that carries both — to the martial it gives trained breath and underlying calm, to the civil gathered stillness, and to both the ranking that distinguishes the whole tradition: character over technique, the transformation of the person over the accumulation of skill.

What a modern revival regains, here too, is not the institutions and not the legends, but the pedagogy. The historical arc has shown that the practice itself — the methodical stretching, breathing, and stilling — is, through the Mawangdui find, dated two millennia deeper than its invented labels; that it received its staging and its moral binding in inner alchemy and Buddhist practice; that the twentieth century reframed it as “Qigong” and rediscovered it in a mass fever; and that it is practiced to this day, in living cultivation paths — foremost Falun Dafa, which expressly places the refinement of moral nature above the exercise — in its full, spiritual sense, even under persecution. The evidence has contributed its share: the cultivating form of Taijiquan passes the strictest test of modern medicine, fall prevention; the broad body of studies supports balance, well-being, and functional health; and slow breath proves to be the physiological lever that the tradition placed first from the outset. At the same time, the limits were named: modest effect sizes where the market promises miracles; light intensity where the body also needs strength and endurance; and the constant danger that stillness becomes flight — against which the tradition itself holds its best remedy, the relocation of the test into everyday life.

With this the series closes, and its recurring lessons now stand on three feet. Institutions remold tradition according to their purposes — the military examination the *wu*, the civil examination system the *wen*, the clinical framing Qigong —; what is worth preserving and transmissible is the pedagogy, not the institution. A living tradition can only be preserved by being practiced, and can only be practiced by being adapted — the silk panel of Mawangdui shows ordinary people, not priests, and it is precisely there, into the everyday lives of ordinary people, that the practice belongs today as well. And the cultivation model — the daily small exercise over years, the spiral rather than the finish line — is the one principle that carries all the plans of all three volumes, because it is the principle of the root itself. The complete person of the tradition, *wen wu shuang quan*, is not a hero with two talents, but an ordinary person with an unusually sustained practice: in the morning the breath and the form, by day the work and the patience, in the evening the book and the stillness. Further volumes on individual strands may follow this series; but its triad is closed with this volume, and its closing word has remained its first: the tradition needs no exaggeration to be worth preserving; it gains when examined closely — and it does not live by being examined, but by being practiced.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Meaning
<i>Baduanjin</i> 八段錦	the “Eight Brocades”; a sequence of eight stretching and breathing exercises attested since the Song period, to this day one of the most widely practiced moving forms; the attribution to Yue Fei is legend.

Term	Meaning
<i>daoyin</i> 導引	“guiding and pulling”; the earliest documented shape of cultivation practice: therapeutic stretching, bending, and breathing exercise (<i>Zhuangzi</i> ; <i>Daoyintu</i> of Mawangdui).
Falun Dafa 法輪大法	also Falun Gong 法輪功; a cultivation path publicly introduced by Li Hongzhi in 1992 that places the refinement of moral nature (<i>xinxing</i>) according to the values <i>zhen</i> , <i>shan</i> , and <i>ren</i> above the five exercises; the best-known living example of full <i>xiulian</i> ; persecuted in China since 1999.
<i>gongfu</i> 功夫	skill acquired through persistent effort over time; the shared concept of practice in the martial arts and in cultivation.
<i>jing-qi-shen</i> 精氣神	the “three treasures” of inner alchemy: vital essence, vital breath, and spirit, refined in an ordered sequence.
<i>jingzuo</i> 靜坐	“silent sitting”; the Daoist-Confucian designation of motionless concentration exercise.
<i>neidan</i> 內丹	Daoist “inner alchemy”; relocates the crucible of refinement into the practitioner’s body; the classical locus of staging in the path of cultivation.
<i>qi</i> 氣	breath, vital force, vital energy; the central concept of traditional self- and world-description, treated in this work as a concept of the tradition, not as a measured quantity.
<i>qigong</i> 氣功	modern collective name, established from 1949, for the breathing and movement exercises stemming from <i>daoyin</i> ; the clinical-secular framing of the old cultivation practice.
Quanzhen 全真	“Complete Perfection”; Daoist school founded in the twelfth century that combined <i>neidan</i> practice with active everyday virtue.
<i>tiao shen</i> , <i>tiao xi</i> , <i>tiao xin</i> 調身/調息/調心	the “three regulations” of body, breath, and heart/mind; the common denominator of all forms of practice in the field.
<i>tuna</i> 吐納	“expelling and taking in”; the classical breathwork, attested since the Mawangdui manuscripts.
<i>wen /wu</i> 文/武	the civil and the martial; the complementary pair of the series. This volume treats the root beneath both.
<i>wen wu shuang quan</i> 文武雙全	“complete in both the civil and the martial”; the guiding ideal of the whole, perfected human being.
<i>Wuqinxi</i> 五禽戲	the “Five Animal Frolics” attributed to Hua Tuo; early medical-gymnastic exercise sequence in imitation of animals.
<i>xinxing</i> 心性	“heart-nature,” moral nature or character; in cultivation, the actual measure of progress, which the bodily exercises serve.
<i>xiulian</i> 修煉	“tending and refining”; the spiritual, stepwise, transforming cultivation of the whole person; the subject of this volume and the common root of <i>wen</i> and <i>wu</i> .
<i>xiushen</i> 修身	the cultivation of one’s own person; the moral, this-worldly twin of <i>xiulian</i> and the core of civil education (Volume II).
<i>xiuxing</i> 修行	the Buddhist form of cultivation: steady meditative and moral practice structured into morality, concentration, wisdom.
<i>xiuzhen</i> 修真	“to cultivate truth”; the classical Daoist form: return to the true, original state of the human being.
<i>yangsheng</i> 養生	“nourishing life”; traditional health care, under whose name the exercises were transmitted wherever they were not religiously framed.
<i>Yijinjing</i> 易筋經	“Classic of Muscle/Tendon Change”; exercise text of the late Ming period (oldest version 1624) with forged prefaces pointing to Bodhidharma; a set piece of legend criticism.

Term	Meaning
<i>zhen, shan, ren</i> 真善忍	truthfulness, compassion/benevolence, forbearance/tolerance; according to the self-understanding of Falun Dafa, the highest measure of the cosmos and the standard of cultivation in everyday life.
<i>zuochan</i> 坐禪	sitting in concentration in the Chan school; the Buddhist main source of the still form of practice.

Sources and Literature

The bibliography is organized by source type, following the method set out in the prefatory note on sources. Classical Chinese titles are given with characters and an English rendering. Citation follows the English scholarly convention; on contested points of premodern dating, the running footnotes report the state of research rather than asserting a settled fact. For the health-related sections, sources are weighted by strength of evidence; where the evidence is preliminary, this is indicated in the main text.

A. Classical and Premodern Primary Sources

Daoyin tu 導引圖 (Chart of Guiding and Pulling). Mawangdui 馬王堆, Tomb 3, c. 168 BCE (excavated 1973). Earliest pictorial evidence of systematic stretching and breathing exercise; the Archimedean point of this volume's source-critical account.

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Yijinjing 易筋經 (Classic of Muscle/Tendon Change). Oldest surviving version 1624, with forged prefaces; treated here as a set piece of legend criticism (cf. Shahar).

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B. Primary Source of Contemporary Self-Understanding

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C. Religious-Studies and Historical Scholarship

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D. Scholarly Reference Apparatus

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E. Modern Empirical Research (weighted by strength of evidence)

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Methodological Concluding Remark. The work combines the documentary and archaeological record (the *Zhuangzi*, the Mawangdui finds, the textual history of the exercise sequences) with the standard religious-studies literature on Daoist and Buddhist self-cultivation (Kohn, Komjathy, Gethin), the scholarly history of modern Qigong (Palmer), and the standard religious-studies works on Falun Dafa (Ownby, Penny), whose self-understanding is reported according to the primary source (*Zhuan Falun*) and whose persecution from 1999 is named as a documented historical fact; the scholarly reference apparatus of ChinaKnowledge.de serves for data and institutional detail. Founding attributions (Hua Tuo, Yue Fei, Bodhidharma) are fundamentally uncertain and are treated as attributions or legends. For the health-related sections, the work relies on peer-reviewed meta-analyses and systematic reviews, weighted by strength of evidence, as explained in Chapters 6 and 7; the limits of the evidence — small samples, lack of blinding, light exercise intensity — are noted in place, and claims of superiority or of healing are not made. This volume forms the root of the conceptual pair *wen wu*: it concludes the three-volume series whose first two volumes unfolded the martial and the civil, and it follows the same method.