5th INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE ON KINESIOLOGY

"KINESIOLOGY RESEARCH TRENDS AND APPLICATIONS"

September 10 – 14, 2008
Faculty of Kinesiology, Zagreb, Croatia

Proceedings Book

Editors-in-Chief:
Dragan Milanović and Franjo Prot

Organizer:
Faculty of Kinesiology,
University of Zagreb, Croatia

Under the patronage of:
Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
Croatia
5th International Scientific Conference on Kinesiology

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In cooperation with:
- Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Faculty of Sport and PE, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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THE FUNCTION OF QI GONG AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH GYMNASTICS AND SPORT IN HEALTH PROMOTION

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Abstract

The main purpose of Qi Gong is to reproduce and reformulate those patterns which, through body exercises, postures and different forms of movement enable to regain an instinctive reactivity obtaining the rebalance of the vital energy, activating the single energetic and psychic, material and mechanic components. The big differences existing between the western and eastern societies reflect the single countries’ cultures, which have developed starting from very different historical background. They tackle different issues, but the purpose is the same: man’s health (Maccioeia, 1996). One of the main differences is the way human being is examined: the Chinese way, different from the western one, always takes into account the person as a whole and is a less palpable way, which means that it is not based on quantitative data which can be precisely measured, but on general concepts and empirical observations. The study of the movement, too, analyzed in connection with education and sport issues, is affected by such a distance between psychological and somatic concepts, and is not easy to imagine it as an integrated phenomenon, even though it probably represents one of the best exemplification of the wholeness which is characteristic of the human being.

Key words: Qi Gong, health, dialectic culture, education, sport, chinese gymnastic

Introduction

Chinese traditional philosophy dates back to 5000 years ago its history is recorded in classical books which include both theoretical and practical aspects, and been translated, revisited and popularized all over the world. Such books represent the basic corpus to which we still refer today to understand all the different branches of this field: “Huangdi Neijing, IV century B.C. is divided in two parts: Su Wen and Ling Shu; Nan Jing, III century B.C.; Shenrong Bencao Jing I century A.D.; Shang Han Za Bin Lun, I century A.D.” Besides, we also must take into account the tradition related to the teaching of the physician Hua Tuo; he did not leave any written account, but his teaching has been transmitted through several records. One of the most interesting record related to the origins of the gymnastics for health, Qi gong, is a silk roll made of three texts and a plate. Such table called Daoyin tu represents women and men while doing Qi Gong exercises in the same postures still used today. The spreading and the application of the theories has been very slow, since there was the tendency to hand down one’s knowledge from father to son, so the spreading and the transmission of such a knowledge was very limited and it caused a sparse knowledge of such theories. We must include in the Chinese tradition a very rich practical experience achieved during the years, from which the efficiency of methodology derives. The most famous branches in the world which better express the criteria of the philosophy considering the man’s health as the main purpose are: Acupuncture, Qigong and Taijiquan (gymnastic – meditation), Tuina-Ammo (Chinese massage), chinese phytoterapy and special diets. “The main features of Chinese philosophy are to be found in the dialectical method, in the organicistic concept of the human being and the world, as well as in the relationships between human being and the nature. This is the main difference between the eastern and western world way of thinking” (Yan Chong Wen, 2001).

The tradition

The traditional theory is deeply rooted in the philosophical bases of Naturalism which in China, since the ancient times, are expressed in a dialectical conception of reality as well as in the philosophy of wu wei. The general view of nature has built on during the time, assuming the form of Yin Yang and of the five natural elements (Water, Fire, Earth, Metal and Wood).

The position of man in the natural world is then interpreted on the base of a system of dialectical relationships between the five elements constituting the natural world and the five main organs of human body: the five Zangfu, as well as the energetic channels system (or Meridians Jingluo). The organicistic view, which is typical of the Chinese thought, is well expressed in two distinctive traits of this philosophy: the unitary view (holistic) of human body phenomena and the approach to pathological systems; such systems are grouped in a system of groups which are apparently not homogeneous and not collateral, but they are actually controlled by a dialectical and not mechanistic definition of their causes and interrelationships.
The unitary and systemic view of the body and its organic apparatus enabled to work out an interactive interpretation of the life phenomenon, as well as its endless transformation and movement, giving it a rational and systemic nature.

The correspondence between human body and nature can represent the explanation of the state of health or illness. (Maciocia, 1996).

**West and East**

The human being is settled in the natural world through a system of mutual relationships and influences which are organized according to two specific fields:

- The relation between the human body and the five elements or elements constituting the natural world (water, fire, wood, earth, metal);
- The explanation of human life phenomena according to the two opposite aspects internal/external and their mutual relationships (Su Wen, 1993).

Through the application of the above mentioned theories the Chinese science has acquired the ability to interpret in a systematic way the phenomenon of life from an unitary point of view. The body is seen as a living organism, which is constantly changing, and its physiological changes explanation are rationally connected to changes occurring in the environment he lives in. Besides, the body learns how to respect the laws of the nature and how to benefit from it, without trying to control and subjugate it (just the reverse of the modern Western science) (Maciocia, 1996). In particular, assessing the condition of an organism always represents a process of interpretation of the symptoms which manifest through the historical and contextual investigation of the person: such investigation is carried out applying a dialectical methodology, a methodology which in charge of understanding the complexity of life phenomenon; man's health is one of these phenomena.

The western culture observes the body through a dualistic view of the human being, so, what is previously split is then difficult to put together. In fact, although we often try to put together the body and the psyche, "...no psychosomatic medicine could arrange the threads of two weaves made of such two different woofs and to put together what had been thought as separated at its beginning" (Sotte-Pippa, 2001).

**The Innovations**

The future view of the research of health will have to satisfy needs emerging from the developing of the modern society and the new life styles.

The life rhythm is getting faster and the ante is higher and higher. The consequences of a man's nought are more and more dramatic, people's careers go forward and backward more rapidly than in the past, the psycho-physical breakdown has often severe consequences and it is starting appearing in younger and younger people. Therefore, great attention is paid to all the methods which can promote a general health condition, necessary to have higher possibilities of success (Garratt T., 2004).

On subject, in the West different theories, such as some psychological theories have been investigated and applied too (NPL) (Bandler R. - Grinder J., 2004). Great attention was paid to nutrition and to some techniques useful for physical and mental recovery (meditation), in order to improve the condition of attention and participation of a person. They have a positive outcome in the field of education and/or to optimize the sport and work performances. It is then necessary to understand the relation between the organic and the somatic difficulties, the psychological sphere and the social issues. In this sense the progress should occur mostly in a context of integration between the genetic, somatic and environmental aspects of such issue.

Since the ancient times, the Chinese employed some techniques to reach the health state which were perfectly integrated with the unitary vision of the human being; "The corporeity is the Yin expression (material) of the mental Yang, the harmony of the body movement represents the expression of a correct balance, which is to say that turning away from such unity is the first sign of a man's disease", (Sotte L., Pippa L., 2001).

Qi Gong and Taijiquan have the basic purpose to reproduce and reformulate the models that through body exercises, postures and forms imitating animals and atmospheric agents, enable to regain an instinctive reactivity by achieving the single energetic and psychic, material and mechanical components.

From an historical point of view, four different models of medicine have developed, and in such models Qi Gong can have an important function.

1. **Therapeutic Medicine.** In fact, Qi Gong promotes the principle with which for the first time we deal with the treatment of a disease. The exercises of such method support the recovery of the deficient body functions, help to obtain the balance that, in turn, promotes the improving of our energy circulation; The faster our energy goes, the less we can be attacked by the outside forces. Qi must flow along the channels following their right course. Our physiological Qi is called Zheng Qi. When an internal or external excess, a pathogenic energy attack, an imbalance or a deficiency
disturb the body our Qi cannot flow regularly, but it will turn aside and change its speed; in other words Qigong is the way to help Qi flowing regularly and more rapidly, causing an improvement of our immune defence system.

2. Preventive medicine. It consists of a constant observation of one’s psycho-physical condition so to be able to intervene by activating circulation of Qi when the first signs of imbalance appear: this is a particular attention one gives to one’s lifestyle so to avoid to get ill.

3. Rehabilitative Medicine. It is intended not only to heal disease through Qi, but also to recover a fine form after convalescence.

4. Mind Medicine. The aim is to activate consciously all our resources.

Our organism, seen as an organic whole, which includes all these elements, needs a corresponding whole of practices and “gymnastics” which can stimulate and control the physical (body and breath), mental, energetic and spiritual health.

In the West the hiatus psyche-soma attributes to the left cerebral hemisphere the understanding of the conscious organization, which is mechanical and scientific, and of the motion, while it attributes to the right hemisphere the aesthetic, artistic perception ability of the same phenomenon.

“In the East the correct practice of a Qi Gong exercise corresponds to the beauty of the gestures of such exercises, thus activating the so called internal unions: the Heath Xin and the Idea/Thought Yi, the Idea Yi and the Energy Qi and, finally, the Energy Qi and the Strenght Li.

When we learn a movement we experiment different phases: the hearth, prince of Psychology, generates the idea of movement (first union); the idea of movement generates Energy (second union); the Energy translates into Strenght, which materializes through the final act. The movement generated (third union) will be the result if the perfect expression of the psychosomatic integration, and for this reason it will have to be aesthetically beautiful” (Sotte L., Pippa L., 2001).

Considering this eastern world view, our scientific approach means to deepen those theories which, if applied daily, can promote an health condition so to improve the cognitive and performance conditions of the person. In such a sense Qi Gong can be intended in the service of education and sport, too.

“Qi Gong has some movement sequences which have the purpose to open the orifices of cephalic region (eye, nose, mouth-tongue, ear), some important acupoints directly or indirectly connected with the inner part of the body; through these points is possible to reactivates the balancing of the corresponding internal organs according to the Chinese medicine” (Sotte-Pippa, 2001). Planning a methodology which can improve the energetic activities of the senses means to create the conditions to achieve a health state, which is useful to strengthen the use of body multisensoriality (Gamelli, 2001) in order to support the training processes of the students.

So, is licit to reflect on the possibility that Qi Gong can nourish the improvement of the cognitive skills of the subject. In fact, some authors think that the use of the senses alternative to the school traditional canonicity can be an emotionally involving information gathering modality, which is the essential condition for a forced learning and memorizing process. (Le Doux, 2002). Therefore, through the exercises aiming at the person energetic rebalancing, together with the meeting, the exchange, the relation with other particularly stimulating training contexts which are different from corporeal point of view, the student learns how to enhance the learning itself and feels a sense of gratification for the building of the knowledge and of its skills. In the same way the athlete, through the integration of the medical gymnastics can physically recover that harmony with the nature balance, that “enable us to achieve that internal silence which harmonize ourselves with the cosmos/universe” (Sotte-Pippa, 2001).

The author states that, by activating the functions of muscles, tendons, joints of the whole body and marrow (brain and spinal marrow in T.C.M.) and the energy circulation within the primary and secondary channels, the blood and body fluids circulation is promoted, too; besides, all the structures of locomotor system get stronger and more flexible, so the blood production and the immune system are stimulated, too. Through the brain, the hypophysis and the spinal marrow there is also an action on the psycho-neuro-immune-endocrine system, through the mental visualization of movements the Shen, the mental aspect become more peaceful and more stable. Finally, everyone will have to optimize this silence in order to realize one’s truth.

Conclusions

The western sport was born, since the first games in Olympia, together with the concept of competitiveness: the contest with an “enemy” to bat seems the sine qua non category of the sport practice, and it gets more evident in team sports.

Competitiveness of the contenders generates the fans’ shouting, and they have become now a social category which, for better or for worse makes the stadium coloured and lively, as well as the Monday morning discussions. In this field the Chinese gymnastics are different, too, and western people wonder about some issues. It is true that some of these gymnastics are considered a part of martial arts (e.g. Gongfu) or personal defense techniques, therefore they include the aspect of competitiveness, while other gymnastics such as Qigong and Taiji, not only did not generate in an competitive