

# **Restoring Natural Harmony – Qigong in Australia**

**Simon Blow**

## **The rippling effect of Qi**

The understanding of Qi and the development of Qi cultivation practices or what we call Qigong has a long and proud history in China. This body of knowledge has grown since ancient times from the indigenous people of China, evolving to become an art and science, and generating the foundation for Traditional Chinese Medicine, to spread throughout the world. Understanding of these Chinese healing arts has been fostered over the last thirty years by the establishment of professional academic organisations in China and specifically the World Academic Society of Medical Qigong (WASMQ).

The WASMQ has encouraged international Qigong practitioners and supporters to come to China to share their own experiences and to appreciate the rich culture of the Chinese people. The wisdom and skills gained from direct contact with the Qi at its origin has spread to Australia and elsewhere. This rippling effect has permeated out through many people and has empowered those who have taken on the legacy of the traditional healing arts to share it with others and to ultimately help restore natural harmony throughout the world.

One of the basic understandings of restoring natural harmony is the principle of the connection between us, as human beings, and our connection to our environment or universe. According to the Dao and Traditional Chinese Medicine the human body has an elaborate internal energy system which is a microcosm to the external world or macrocosm. Through our work or cultivation (Gong) we allow our internal landscape to merge with the external landscape, to become one. In this natural world our body is designed to regulate, balance and heal itself. If we lose this connection it can cause an imbalance and dysfunction in the body's energy system, causing illness and disease both physically and emotionally resulting in the downgrading of our quality of life.

While modern technology has become an important tool in our changing world, an excess or overstimulation of the mind from this technology can cause problems and take us away from our connection. The dynamic movements and static meditations that we practise in Qigong are a way of re-establishing this natural connection that we can so easily lose, which stems mostly from not being present, from not being connected to the world we live in. The aim of our practice (Gong) is to allow our true identity, our spirit or our consciousness to awaken and to merge with the Dao/the Divine. In this natural state our Qi becomes abundant, harmonising our internal energy system, improving our quality of life, which allows us to fully appreciate the beauty of our world.

## **The Australian experience of Qi**

Australia is a large continent similar in its physical size to China but with a much smaller population as nearly 80% of the interior of the country is desert, rich in natural resources but largely uninhabitable. The indigenous people of Australia have a natural connection to the ancient lands; their entire physical and spiritual realm revolves around them being in harmony with the place in which they live. Australia was colonised just 250 years ago and has become a modern western

country with the most culturally and linguistically diverse population in the world. It's essential to mention here, we are all indigenous people of this world, it doesn't really matter where or from which country our family comes, we are all from this world. We can all learn to be more tolerant, respectful and considerate to each other and our different cultures, to re-establish our connection to the world we live in, to restore natural harmony.

It was during Australia's early colonisation period where knowledge of Chinese health cultivation custom was first introduced to the country by the Chinese immigrant diaspora. More recently, just forty years or so, the extensive art and science as well as health benefits of traditional Chinese healing practices has steadily spread throughout Australian society.

In Australia, and throughout the world, Qigong has found acceptance as a healing and restorative practice, which to differing degrees has been incorporated into the medical framework of complementary health therapies and broader wellness services.

With the establishment of WASMQ in 1989 there was for the first time a platform for Qigong professionals and enthusiasts from China as well as the rest of the world to meet regularly and present academic and clinical research. As an aside, I , as a representative from Australia, have participated since 1998 and continue to be actively involved. I have valued the WASMQ Conferences as a forum for Qigong teachers to discuss and share training methods and teaching principles. Analysing the release of conference papers and presentations and information shared through many scholarly and medical publications there now appears to be much evidence-based material of the benefits of Qigong generally and more particularly for a large range of chronic conditions.

I have been pleased to contribute to the growing awareness in my country of Medical Qigong and recognition that it is now a highly researched health enhancement practice. This is a valuable step in the further promotion and uptake of this positive healing tradition by the wider Australian community and thus advances WASMQ's mission.

However, the pressing issue for the future of Qigong in Australia and beyond is the demand for increased provision of quality-trained teachers to expand services into the community.

## **My personal journey to Qigong**

I was first introduced to the Traditional Chinese Health cultivation exercises over thirty five years ago as a way of increasing my health and wellbeing after being involved in a serious car accident in 1979 in which I very nearly didn't survive. After the accident I spent four years undergoing regular physiotherapy at a number of clinics in Sydney, Australia. This had a somewhat positive outcome, but I wasn't able to fully recover as it treated only my physical condition. I wanted to go deeper, so I commenced meditation training. This was very good for my concentration and calmness of mind, but my body unremittingly deteriorated. Thankfully a few years later I was led to Taijiquan and Qigong, which I discovered, had a remarkable effect on my energy and slowly I gained strength and balance. By 1990 I became a full-time accredited Tai Chi/Qigong teacher and dedicated myself to work with many different groups helping them develop self healing skills to manage stress and improve their own quality of life.

When I attended my first WASMQ Conference in Beijing in 1998 my awareness and understanding opened up much further. I was very pleased to be in the company of many high level Masters and some of the leading Qigong specialists from around the world; personally, it felt like a coming home experience. My knowledge of Qigong was enhanced; the ripple effect of the connection to Qi spread through me and has inspired my ever-evolving Qigong career. Through this connection I have been building a bridge to China to lead other Australians to also experience the wonders of these ancient health enhancement practises.

## **Spreading Peace and Natural Harmony**

There have been many successful initiatives over the years to help in my mission to share the knowledge and benefits of Qigong practice, some of which I will briefly summarise below:

- Qigong Study Tours to China
- Publishing of Qigong books, DVDs, CDs; and Multimedia and Social Media broadcasting
- Qigong Classes and Speaking Events
- Qigong Workshops and Residential Retreats in Australia and other countries
- Qigong Teacher Training Programs
- Qigong Classes within Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centres

### **1. Qigong Study Tours to China**

In the past 20 years, I have arranged and led thirty Qigong Study Tours travelling far and wide to various parts of China. The purpose of these study and cultural tours is for education, growth and awareness, and to bring people to the source to experience personally the Qi energy and to be in direct contact with the Masters at the source of the Qi energy.

Over 500 students have completed the study tours. Individuals have come from Australia as well as the US, UK and Europe. Many of them are practitioners of Natural Therapies, TCM doctors and students, western medicine professionals, yoga teachers, aged care and community health care workers, Tai Chi/Qigong teachers, and all are Qigong enthusiasts.

Participants receive training and certification from many respected organisations in China including Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospitals, Universities, Traditional lineage holders and Daoist Monasteries. For example:

- Guigen Medical Qigong under the guidance of Dr Xu Hongtao from the *Xiyuan Hospital, Beijing* from 2004 to 2016.
- The *Shanghai Qigong Research Institute* from 2000 to the present.
- Da Yan Wild Goose Qigong under the guidance of the 28<sup>th</sup> lineage holder Grand Master Chen Chuan Gang from 2007 to present. Australia now has the most number of lineage students and certified teachers outside of China.
- Daoist Studies under the guidance of Master Wu Cheng Zhen the Abbess of the *Chang Chun - Eternal Spring Daoist Monastery* in Wuhan from 2006 to present.
- and many other sacred Daoist areas including *Wudangshan* and *Qingchengshan* from 1999 to present.

## **2. Publishing of books, DVDs, CDs, Multimedia and Social Media broadcasting**

The creation of a publishing business in 1999 to promote Qigong and the Chinese Health Cultivation practices has demonstrated ongoing success. There is always a commitment to the highest standard of technical teaching and quality educational material. We continue to expand due to interest and demand from the general public, Qigong students and international sales. Out of my constant learning efforts and leadership growth I continue to formulate new and better ways to teach Qigong forms and Dao principles. Development of new products is ongoing, initially in hard form such as books and discs, and more recently in digital media forms, such as online subscriptions, internet applications such as a video channel and other social media formats. The publishing business initially started with VHS videos then moved onto DVDs, Audio CDs and across a portfolio of specialist books. To date there have been six printed books, eight DVDs, nine CDs including a set of four meditation CDs designed for children.

The business continues to sell through different distribution channels, such as:

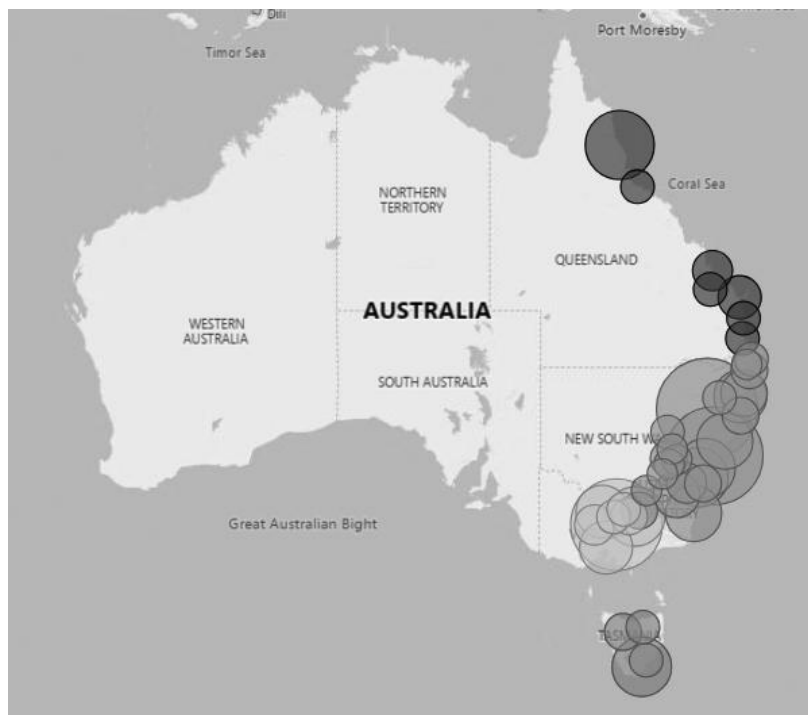
- Our website [simonblowqigong.com](http://simonblowqigong.com)
- Internationally through the Amazon facility and other online book sellers
- Our YouTube Channel [simonblowqigong](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) - advertising and social media presence (Facebook),
- Our guest lecturer roles at external forums eg Princess Cruise Lines 'Wellness Programs'
- Point of Sale (POS) and continuous direct orders (around Australia at workshops and classes)
- Via subscriber Newsletters and other promotional strategies (eg articles in specialist magazines and newspapers, telephone and direct mail)
- Via an electronic subscriber service and a download facility

## **3. Qigong Classes and speaking events**

Since 1990 I have continued to personally teach classes on a permanent and regular basis in local Sydney communities throughout the year. Some classes are introductory available on a casual drop in basis while some are intermediate classes for trained students and others are special needs classes arranged or hosted by external organisations. Examples of classes I lead are:

- Classes for groups run in community colleges as well as neighbourhood and senior citizen centres or other community based facilities.
- Classes for students at universities, art colleges and acting schools have been organised as lifestyle courses through their student unions.
- Corporate wellness classes for staff of Government agencies, private business and Not-for-Profit organisations.
- Day and evening classes for the general public
- Clinical classes for hospital patients undergoing cancer treatment

#### 4. Qigong Workshops and Residential Retreats



This map demonstrates the rippling effect of Qigong workshops and retreats in Australia. The location and number of events held are represented by the size and placement of circles (small = 5, large > 20+).

Since 1996 I have been invited by health, community and wellness professionals to present Qigong Weekend Workshops in regional areas throughout Australia and overseas. In Australia these tend to be located mainly along the populous eastern seaboard from the states of Queensland down to New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Internationally, workshops and retreats are held in countries including China, USA, UK, Europe and Indonesia.

The purpose of these Workshops and Retreats is to spread the benefits of the Chinese health cultivation practices and empower local teachers with the ripple effect of the Qi so they can continue to share this message within their community. The structure of the workshops and retreats come from the books and DVDs that I have published giving the students a good foundation to practise with.

There has been growing requests to run more intensive four and five day residential retreats.

#### 5. Qigong Teacher Training Programs

Some time back it was becoming obvious that growing interest by Australians required more people to run regular Qigong classes around the country. I alone wasn't able to reach the expanding demand for my teaching, and thus a need for suitably trained teachers with the right commitment became evident. Sincere individuals and existing teachers in the health and wellness industry also approached me with a desire for deeper learning of Qigong in order to lead groups and to share this healing practice within their local community.

Since 2015 I have embarked on a vision for enhancing the spread of Qigong's benefits through the development of a certified Qigong Teacher Training Programme. This is a complete and thorough educational and experiential teaching curriculum, made up of a three level certification process to be undertaken over a minimum of two years. It includes intensive residential workshops, self-practise, practice assessments and the completion of a Government accredited Traditional Chinese Medicine theory component

To date we are pleased to have established a professional network of 84 Certified Qigong Teachers across Australia. I am proud to say that most of these teachers have had the direct experience of accompanying me in travelling to China on the Qigong Study Tours to learn from Masters at the source. We provide a supportive environment to foster continued learning and professional development for the mission of sharing the benefits of Qigong to all no matter where people live or what health circumstances they are in.

## **6. Qigong Classes within Drug & Alcohol Rehabilitation**

Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation is a field of practice that I have committed my professional life to and it's with grateful humility that I am recognised by my peers and at WASMQ as a subject matter expert on the benefits of Medical Qigong in this type of patient recovery.

Since the commencement of my vocation in 1990 teaching Qigong to the Australian community, I have been interested in sharing these self-healing techniques with others who would not normally come into contact with its holistic principles. I established a Qigong practice for patients in recovery within several Drug & Alcohol Rehabilitation & Therapeutic Programs in Sydney and have close to thirty years of continuous service. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn and grow from this rewarding experience and wish to share some background and insights here.

Early on in my career (1992) I was invited to see if I could help at a pioneering organisation called We Help Ourselves (WHOS) formed in 1972 as the first Therapeutic Community for drug and alcohol dependent individuals in Australia. WHOS has evolved into a leading national as well as internationally recognised drug and alcohol rehabilitation organization. Their major campus in Sydney (formerly known as the Callan Park and Rozelle Hospital) is a 130 bed facility for residents, consisting of three to six months full time care, set in large, tranquil gardens by a calm bay leading into Sydney harbour. Twice weekly I lead groups for three different Qigong programs with an average of 100 residents (students) per week in attendance. I find the community, as an important component of recovery, has embraced the Qigong practice with its natural grounding and centering techniques in a positive environment.

Over the last three decades I have successfully taught Qigong to nearly 9000 residents (recovering addicts) attending various therapeutic programs:

- Men's Programme: 180 residents x 27 years
- Women's Programme: 100 residents x 17 years
- Methadone Reduction Programme; 80 residents x 20 years
- Stabilisation Programme; 60 residents x 12 years

## **6.1 Research Findings - We Help Ourselves (WHOS) Case Study**

To see if Medical Qigong practice was having any impact on groups attending at WHOS I conducted a longitudinal in-depth study with the drug and alcohol resident population of their Sydney campus, which I will briefly share with you now.

Back in May 2004 I presented to the WASMQ Conference in Beijing regarding the findings of this Research Study and the benefits of Qigong in drug & alcohol rehabilitation. The study ran for a six month period, involving use of a survey instrument to the different groups of residents after every 45-minute class of Qigong (Ba Duan Jin Standing Form led by Simon Blow). The groups undertook a drug-free therapeutic schedule to help foster personal growth and life skills with a view to participants returning to the community. The twice-weekly Qigong classes I taught played an important part of the schedule in a collaboration of group work, counselling, support and education, stress management and relapse prevention.

A qualitative assessment was made based on each participant's own evaluation regarding the role of having practised Qigong to aid in their recovery. Key results suggested it provided beneficial aid to recovering addicts in gaining relaxation skills, body awareness and confidence as well as lessening frustration and regaining balance of body and mind.

Specifically the results highlighted that of 634 surveys completed, 89% of participants found an overall benefit. The following particular therapeutic conditions were measured:

- 95% felt Qigong helped them to be calm and relaxed.
- 93% said they felt more peaceful since learning Qigong and that their future would be a better one
- 92% felt Qigong was an important part of their recovery
- 89% felt stronger emotionally and less frustrated
- 88% felt the practice of Qigong enabled them to concentrate better and felt more confident and better able to control anxiety
- 86% said they were able to accept others more
- 85% said they felt stronger physically

The first step to changing oneself is awareness. In helping participants become more aware of themselves and their bodies, as well as in helping them relax and become less stressed about emotions, the Research Study confirmed the practice of Qigong is demonstrably a method for supporting an individual's attempt to change and recover.

In conclusion, outcomes from this WHOS Case Study clearly confirm Medical Qigong is a significant aid to Drug & Alcohol rehabilitation therapy.

## **6.2 Government and Non-Government Rehabilitation Providers**

I have had the great pleasure in sharing Medical Qigong through many other acknowledged recovery programs in Sydney, for instance:

- NSW Government Corrective Services for male and female inmates at Long Bay, Mulawa and the Norma Parker Correctional Centres (From 1995 to 1997)
- The Salvation Army's Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation program, at separate men and women's groups (From 2003 to 2005)
- Mission Australia Centre, Surry Hills (From 2007 onwards)

- St Vincent De Paul at the Ozanam Learning Centre, Woolloomooloo (2018 ongoing)

I allocate about 40% of my working week to leading these and various other community health programs and am always pleased to be of service to those who are reaching out for help.

I would like to thank my teachers, mentors and guides for all the help and support given to me. Also to all my students and the people I meet that have given me the opportunity to share the healing knowledge and wisdom that has been empowered in me.

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25<sup>th</sup> Generation Dragon Gate Daoism

29<sup>th</sup> Generation Da Yan - Wild Goose Qigong

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