

*The Dao gives birth to One.
One gives birth to Two.
Two gives birth to Three.
Three gives birth to the ten thousand things.
Laozi, Dao De Jing, Chapter 42*

What is Yin-Style Bagua Energy-Bodywork?

By David Parker, CMT

In answering this question, we'll begin with an historical framework.

Yin-style Bagua Energy Bodywork (ybb) is part of a classical Chinese medicine and martial arts system. It is based on the Nei Jing, Nan Jing and Shang Han Lun (Chinese medicine texts approx. 2000 years old), and filtered through the theory of the bagua, or eight trigrams. The part of the bagua most well known in the west is the Yi Jing, or book of changes, but bagua is a way to understand all things in the universe, informed by continuous observation of the workings of nature. Yin-style bagua medicine reached its peak when its two most famous practitioners—Dong Haichuan and Yin Fu—were retained by the Imperial court of China, where they were able to exchange information with the high level doctors of the court, adding to and refining their skills. This was in the latter Jing dynasty at the end of Imperial rule in China, late 1800's–1911. Doctor Xie Peiqi (1920–2003), the last lineage carrier in his line of Yin-style bagua, still called it Imperial bodywork.

The Imperial court physicians were among the best in China. They had to be extremely competent, modest (one certainly did not ask the Emperor or an Imperial concubine to undress!), and very gentle, causing no pain or distress to their patients. Bodywork was one of the main modalities, and one needed great sensitivity and strength of qi coupled with a light comfortable touch to treat the court. Of course the treatment had to be very effective in curing the illness. If you failed, the consequences ranged from expulsion to death.

Without going overboard here, it is important to know that what is today called Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM, is quite modern, defined between the late 1940's and early 1970's by the government as the “officially sanctioned” version of Chinese medi-

cine. This is what is predominantly taught now in schools in China and the west. Before this narrowing and standardizing there was a wide variety of practice, coming through many teaching lineages. Not to say that any of this is good or bad, just that TCM is distinctly different from the older styles. Classical Chinese medicine was richer in scope but it was not necessarily all of equal quality. For those interested in the history of Chinese medicine I have a couple good articles on my website as well as interviews with two senior Beijing doctors. See www.qigongfu.com and click on Chinese Medicine.

What remains of ybb today is quite different from what was practiced in the court, times have changed, but it still retains much of its spirit and potency. Instead of keeping it secret, and only passing it to one or two students, Dr. Xie taught openly at the end of his life, and a small group of westerners studied with him between 1993 and 2003. One in particular spent a number of years living in China and got to know the doctor quite well.

A large part of the skill in this work comes from constant practice of the qigong that specifically develops the strength and sensitivity of qi required by the practitioner. This is a “qi first, strength second” bodywork style. As a recipient, you will often feel the effects of qi moving in your body—warmth, tingling, pressure or a flowing feeling. Traditionally this is called “de qi”, the arrival of qi, and can also be felt sometimes with acupuncture.

I have been learning and practicing the ybb qigong and hand skills since 1996, and incorporating them into my treatments from a TCM perspective. In the past few years I have been studying the classical theory that is underneath ybb, and am now putting together treatments that follow more of the original formats, meaning, as used by Dr. Xie Peiqi.

The doctor was very practical in what he taught, showing us treatments for common problems– colds, bronchitis, asthma, digestive disorders, menstrual disorders, high blood pressure, liver qi stagnation, musculo-skeletal pain and injury– the things he saw all the time. Although he did not have the same name for it, he also taught an approach to working with complex symptom patterns with underlying deficiency resulting in illnesses we call chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, allergic sensitivity, etc.

The basic approach is to awaken the brain and body, and “put them in the right place to heal”, bringing your own healing ability and resources to bear on the illness/imbalance and then stepping back to let the body work. The theory is very beautiful, and underneath it is a logical step-by-step treatment– it’s a nice combination. The work can be deeply relaxing as well as healing. It encourages you to put your critical/analytical mind away and let the treatment take hold at a deeper level of communication with your system. In traditional terms you get out of the realm of “the ten thousand things” (the many symptoms, the many diagnoses, etc.) and work at the level

of three– Jing, Qi and Shen. This refers to the three basic “forms” that energy takes in your body.

This kind of bodywork treatment feels great, and works well. I feel it is a great adjunctive therapy for a variety of illnesses, and is excellent for counteracting the effects of stress. I sometimes have people snoring on the table in a matter of minutes, reporting later being able to let go of their worrisome thoughts and go far, far away for a while. I use the Yin Bagua Energy-bodywork in most all of my treatments, either on its own or combined with western massage therapy, so you may have experienced it without even knowing what it was. For me, this was the bridge between the ultimate limitation of structural bodywork (how hard can you push/be pushed on), and the limitlessness of the energy world. Bagua theory tells us that anything that is created, whether health or disease, can be un-created. This is a very simple example, but is the essence of it. Life is one thing for sure– change, change, change. We try to discover and understand the changes of any situation, and work from that place of realization.