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From Relaxation Response, Building Power for Health to an Advanced Self-Cultivation Practice: Genuine Well-Being

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

Recently, much more mind-body/mindfulness interventions have been used in different people including frail elders, patients with major depressive disorder, pain suffering, chronic fatigue, infection, and patients in intensive care unit, etc. In the field of Complementary and Alternative Medicine, many Chinese mind-body exercises are under very active investigation for evidence-based decision making. At the same time, there is a fact that Yoga and Health *Qigong*/Tai Chi, especially meditative practice based on ancient oriental civilizations, have been practiced for thousands of years and are getting more attention. The use of Traditional Chinese music as therapy was documented around 94 BC and that was foundational to traditional Chinese medicine, building power for health as well. Meditation, as a mind-body practice, originally introduced by cultivators in ancient Eastern religious and/or spiritual traditions has raised increasing awareness recently in the Western world. Medical research results suggest that the benefits of Eastern meditative practices not only include the promotion of emotional and mental health, resilience, stress and anxiety reductions, but also cure other health-related conditions. It was suggested that improvement of moral level would be of the same importance with those achieving mind-body health. Through experiential learning, and what delivering big sample size survey results and numerous case reports, the authors are illustrating the mindful practice of Falun Gong (also called “Falun Dafa”) and have real health-wellness effects to practitioners.

Keywords: meditation, Falun Dafa, mind-body, cultivation, well-being

1. Introduction

Different types of mind-body exercises have been criticized by researchers and practitioners to be lacking in scientific support in two aspects, though these interventions have been practiced by people from different cultures and clinical effects have been observed for centuries. To build

a body of empiric evidence in this related field is a kind of challenge. It was found on decade ago that, 19.2% of U.S. adults (more than 55 million people) had used at least one form of mind-body therapy during the previous 12 months, according to data from the 2007 National Health Interview Survey, the National Centers for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), and the National Center for Health Statistics [1].

The mind-body interaction and related methods originates from ancient Eastern tradition [2, 3]. CAM has not been viewed globally as distinct entities for decades, and there was an example showing that, for many conditions, people tend to integrate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Western medicine, with the treatment principles based upon recognition of the pattern of disharmonies [2, 4], and upon diagnosis, respectively. And there are much more evidence to support the powerful effects of practices that are directed toward the mind or spirituality besides items of human body when talking about health, well-being concepts. While the health benefits of yoga, meditation, and prayer have been aware of and recognized by the general public [5–9], many of the practices that are called *Qigong* (pronounced chi-kung) were getting recognized as transitional health practices and healing techniques.

When the mind-body interaction had been got interested in, and the mechanisms underlying them need to be further understood and systematically studied, also, mindfulness meditation is specifically an unique approach to get health in terms of calling for a clearer conceptualization, and assessing the potential application. Although mindfulness meditation has been formalized for clinical interventions with Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction [10] and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy [11], there are many fields needed to explore that have potential to make mindfulness meditation adopted by a larger population. Meanwhile, a group of high school students' recent outcome from a transcendental meditation (called "Quiet Time Program") conducted by the University of Chicago Crime Lab, has been reported and recommended by staff of Chicago Public Schools because of its goal to address the effects of toxic stress on young people that had also been implemented by students in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City from 2015 [12]. The immediate results yielded for students (such as, suspensions are down, a recent round of SAT prep scores showed improvement, teachers see improvement in students' behavior and ability to concentrate in class) and staff from meditation indicated this approach holds promise in a larger range of utilization scope in human society.

Moreover, people may acknowledge that, Chinese culture was composed of an abundant and very profound system of values, and in Chinese people's mind "man and nature must be in balance" and "respect the heavens to know one's destiny" were the dominant concepts during the whole life. Meanwhile, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness, called five cardinal virtues (ren yi li zhi xin, or 仁義禮智信 in Chinese), are all products of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, the three religions' teachings over China's 5000-year-long history, to which belief in the divine is so central, nowadays presented by Shen Yun Performing Arts that was established in New York, USA in 2006 by elite Chinese artists [13]. Present authors are considering that, people need to know the nature of *Qigong*, as well as mindful practices, even need to find the genuine relationship between the practices, keeping moral level based on following traditional culture, and achieving body and mind health.

2. Relaxation response

Many items will be explored in the field of the mind-body therapies that elicit the relaxation response (RR), which was described almost half century ago, as a status associated with decreases in oxygen consumption, respiratory rate, and blood pressure, along with an increased sense of well-being [14, 15], after a three-stage model of the body's response to stress was introduced by endocrinologist Hans Selye based on the understandings more than 100 years ago of the connection between the mind and body [16], and given a term as stress response (SR) for the systemic adaptations by experts of the Integrative Health Research Jeffery Dusek and Herbert Benson [15].

Some platforms have introduced RR programs [17–19], and a lot of study results have also been reported for brain science, including for brain signals making participant's muscles and organs slow down and increase blood flow to the brain, and effectiveness for stress-related disorders.

After evidence-based research from different Institutes provided the results indicating the benefits of mind-body intervention for some health issues (cardiovascular and neuromuscular conditions) [20–26], or psychological conditions (including depression) [27–32], investigators in one of them demonstrate in pilot studies that the RR-based group intervention, and other modalities (i.e., tai chi, *Qigong*, mindfulness training) have effect on treating mild and moderate depression symptoms [33–35] and maybe regarded as adjunctive treatment for other conditions. Their efforts also have been added into the processing of number increasing of studies [36–38] from different continents of the world showing the promise of multimodal mind-body group interventions for patients with depression.

In 2009, Jeffery Dusek and Herbert Benson presented a model of the physiological and biochemical changes (with two main pathways activated, the sympatho-adrenomedullary (SAM) axis and the hypothalamus-pituitary-adreno (HPA) axis) taking place during exposure to acute stressors or elicitation of the RR, and the relationship between these two responses [15]. The hypothalamus secreting corticotrophin-releasing hormone (CRH), which causes the pituitary gland to release adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), can activate both axes while the later one is thought as one of the other stress hormones to be modulated by nitric oxide (NO) than those (such as cortisol) within the adrenal glands easily inhibited during the initial biosynthetic step in steroid production. NO was shown to play a central role in the development of atherosclerotic plaque, and the regulation of platelet function, vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation, and leukocyte interactions with vascular endothelial cells, as well as to mediate diverse physiological processes including neuronal function and neurotoxicity, immune and cardiovascular functions [39]. Studies from this group also reported that 8 weeks of RR training was an effective therapeutic intervention to counteract the adverse clinical effects of stress in individuals with systolic hypertension, with 8 more weeks training, elicitation of the RR made 32% of participants be able to eliminate one or more of their antihypertensive medications [40].

A most recent study on the links between cardiac health and psychological stress, with the use of ^{18}F -fluorodexoyglucose PET/CT showed that, high levels of activity in the amygdale, a region

known to be involved in emotional processing at the start of the study were associated with an increased risk of experiencing a cardiac event, and the association was significant even after adjusting for other cardiovascular risk factors and atherosclerosis. This first study to link regional brain activity to subsequent cardiovascular disease illustrated findings providing novel insights into the mechanism that how emotional stressors lead to cardiovascular disease in human beings [41]. These procedures may perform as a novel tool for evidence-based medicine to evaluation the whole body effectiveness of the programs (in CAM) mentioned above.

Meanwhile, the number of experiments investigating on gene expression stimulated by the simple activity of interpersonal experience is growing now, and studies have examined gene expression cascades following the use of RR [42, 43] and Chinese *Qigong* [8]. Dusek et al. evaluated possible gene expression changes by RR with the test subjects to elicit RR, and their study included 19 long-term RR practitioners (Group M) versus 20 healthy controls who were tested at baseline (Group N1) and who participated in 8 weeks of training in guided relaxation techniques and were tested again (Group N2). Polymorphonuclear cells (PBMcs) were isolated for the blood sample, and global transcriptome profiles were determined using microarrays (interrogating approximately 47,000 genes and gene variants), and pairwise comparisons of the transcriptomes between the three groups then performed. A 2209 genes (1275 up- and 934 down-regulated) were found to be differentially expressed between Groups M and N1, 1504 genes (774 up- and 730 down-regulated) between Groups M and N2, and 1561 genes (874 up- and 687 down-regulated) between Groups N1 and N2. They suggested that the gene expression changes in the M and N2 (428 genes were shared between the short and long-term RR participants) groups might indicate a greater capacity to respond to oxidative stress and associated detrimental effects; basal gene expression changes in PBMcs can be caused by RR.

3. Building power for health

Where language is lost, music may help bring it back, researchers said at the AAAS (AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE) Annual Meeting (2010) [44]. During the topics of “In a range of New Science, Researchers Find the Power of Music to Build the Brain,” Aniruddh Patel challenged the conventional idea that that music and language are processed independently, saying that “evidence suggests at least a degree of overlap.” It was expected that scientists utilize a range of assessment techniques drawn from psychology and medical studies to fully understand the relationship between language and music and to explore its full power.

Neuroplasticity, with its definition like “the natural tendency of the brain architecture to shift in negative or positive directions in response to intrinsic and extrinsic influences” [45], was regarded as a kind of index when assessing “Building Brain Power for Health” [46] during clinical intervention. Musicians are supposed to show stronger activation in an audiovisual incongruency response and to have response different from unisensory mismatch negativity (MMN) mainly depicted by functional MR imaging (fMRI), so that possess an enhanced responsiveness in a genuine audiovisual process, and all of these would indicate plasticity effects on multisensory processing in musicians [47], which belonged to some forms within the

complex music enrichment to positively influence on neuroplasticity in a number of brain regions [45]. Bottiroli et al. [48] performed a study for non-musician healthy individuals aged 60–84 who listened to the background music of Mozart (as compared to silence and white noise) and the results showed that they improved declarative memory tasks.

Traditional Chinese music can be regarded as a kind of methodology with medical effectiveness, and this was reflected by the similar writing approach between the Chinese characters of “樂” (“music”) and “藥” (“medicine”) (**Figure 1**) [49]. The use of traditional Chinese music as therapy was documented around 94 BC. It is an aspect of the Chinese Theory of Five Elements, which is foundational to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), building power for health as well.

In Traditional Chinese music, the music notes had their relationship with corresponding human body organs in Chinese medicine. In the “Treatise on Music” “樂書” (included within “史記,” “The Scribe’s Records,” a monumental history of ancient China and the world finished by the Han dynasty official Sima Qian), it was introduced that Traditional Chinese music was composed from five notes or sounds (in Chinese) —“宮”(gong), “商” (shang), “角”(jue), “徵”(zhi), and “羽”(yu), having relationship with internal organs of human body in Chinese medicine, like spleen (脾), lung (肺), liver (肝), heart (心), and kidney (腎), respectively, to achieve different healing purposes (**Figure 2**) [50]. In terms of the Chinese Theory of Five Elements, these organs belong to metal, wood, water, fire and earth, respectively. Chinese medicine uses the relationship between internal organs and five-element correspondences, such as traditional Chinese musical notes and their comprehensive effect, to achieve different healing purposes, using musical instruments to relate their states of mind. Western music, meanwhile, focuses on the overall effect of the musical ensemble—and to achieve that, arrangement and harmony are of utmost importance. Both East and West have a long history of artists integrating spirituality into their work.

Traditional Chinese music focuses on expressing inner feelings, and the ancient people always used musical instruments to relate their states of mind. At the same time, music in Western world focuses on the overall effect of the musical ensemble, and in order to achieve that, arrangement and harmony are of utmost importance. Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra blends the spirit of Chinese music with the power of a Western orchestra. All-original compositions draw upon five millennia of culture and legends. Western strings, percussion, woodwinds, and brass accentuate the sound of ancient Chinese instruments—like the two-stringed erhu and the plucked pipa. Never before have the exquisite beauty of Chinese melodies and the grandeur of a Western symphony have been so seamlessly combined.

Music of Shen Yun features the perfect harmony of classical music of East and West. First, the Western orchestra serves as a foundation, accentuating the distinct sound of Chinese instruments. Second, the bedrock of soul-stirring melodies from the ancient Middle Kingdom is fully brought to life by a Western symphony. This is what makes Shen Yun’s music unique and is a new frontier in classical music [50]. Bogdan Zvoristeanu, Concertmaster of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande said about Shen Yun music that, “A different sensuality and a power of expression... It comes from the heart and it goes to the heart.” Present authors propose that, audiences who physically attend to Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra would get a kind of benefits even achieving well-being.

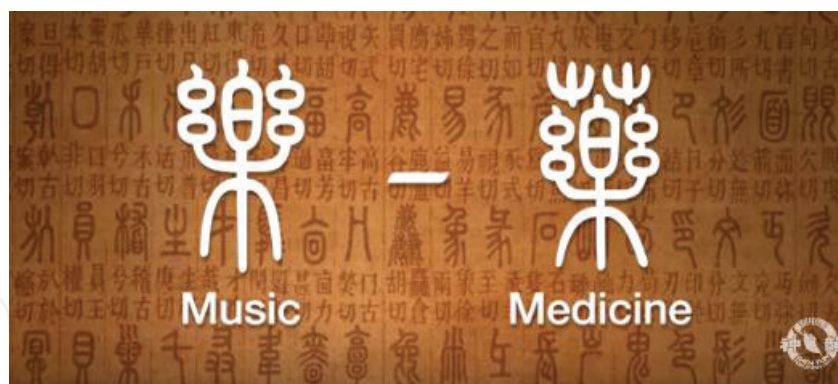


Figure 1. Screen shot from Shen Yun website shows the similarity between the Chinese characters of “樂” (“music”) and “藥.” (Screen shot from Shen Yun website, refer [49].)

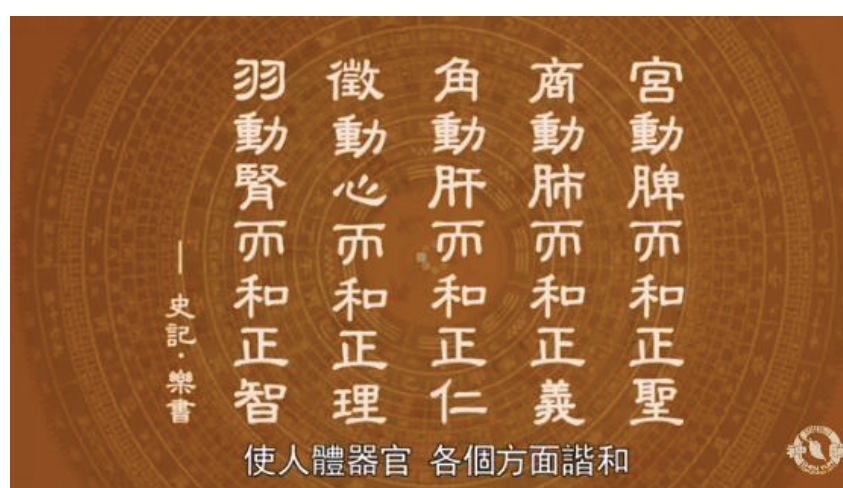


Figure 2. Traditional Chinese music notes and their relationship with corresponding human body organs in Chinese medicine. In the “Treatise on Music” “樂書” (included within “史記,” “The Scribe’s Records,” a monumental history of ancient China and the world finished around 94 BC by the Han dynasty official Sima Qian), classical Chinese music was composed of five notes or sounds (in Chinese) — “宮”(gong), “商”(shang), “角”(jue), “徵”(zhi), and “羽”(yu), having relationship with internal organs in Chinese medicine, like spleen (脾), lung (肺), liver (肝), heart (心), kidney (腎), respectively. (Screen shot from Shen Yun website, refer [49].)

Meditation, as a mind-body practice originally introduced by cultivators in ancient Eastern religious and/or spiritual traditions thousands of years ago, has raised increasing awareness recently in the Western world. Medical research results suggest that the benefits of Eastern meditative practices not only include the promotion of emotional and mental health, resilience, coping skills, stress and anxiety reductions, but also cure other health-related conditions.

Meditation provided participants in an eight-week mindfulness meditation program [51] cognitive and psychological benefits that persist throughout the day, that was measurable changes in brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy and stress. Within the study led by an investigating team at Massachusetts General Hospital, they looked at the brain MR scans of 16 people before and after taking Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program, and it was found that reductions in gray matter volume in the right

basolateral amygdala (structure for anxiety and stress occurrence) obtained from MRI scans had relationship with reductions in perceived stress following MBSR. It was suggested that plasticity-related alterations in brain regions implicated in stress can occur after short term of mindfulness meditation training, and they concluded that parts of the participants' brains associated with compassion and self-awareness grew, and parts associated with stress shrank. Earlier studies with the analysis of MR images, which focused on areas where meditation-associated differences were illustrated, showed that increased grey-matter density in the hippocampus, known to be important for learning and memory, and in structures associated with self-awareness, compassion and introspection. They also suggested that longer-term meditation practice might be needed to produce changes in a self-awareness-associated structure called the insula though no change was seen in their studies. And they were glad to know the brain's plasticity from imaging data, and know that practicing meditation can play an active role in changing the brain and can increase people's well-being and quality of life [52, 53]. Based on some scientists' observation, music has some reward value beyond the pleasurable sounds and direct feedback, it also plays an important role in social interactions, both in contexts of group listening and music making, which needed to be further investigated, at the same time, research can be performed in some important aspects in the context of music and learning, both including pupil-teacher interactions and imitation learning, social reward and influences on self-perception, and some negative influences (such as stress in professional situations and performance anxiety).

A group of US and UK scientists, by using fMRI has extended the observations in the field of empathy processes studies that can be modulated by the implicit context of the empathic experience, and their findings showed that brain regions associated with empathic processes were modulated by voluntary regulation of one's emotional responses with compassion meditation [54].

4. An advanced self-cultivation practice: Falun Dafa

Falun Dafa (also called Falun Gong) has a heritage dating back thousands of years when it existed as teachings passed down secretly from one master to one disciple for generations. It was introduced to the public in 1992 when its founder, Mr. Li Hongzhi, the practice's master, gave the first series of lectures on the practice in Changchun, Jilin province and in northeastern China [55]. Master Li had traveled across China (and later to France and Sweden) giving similar nine-day seminars 54 times during the following 2 years [56]. Over the next few years, interest in the practice skyrocketed, fueled by word of Falun Dafa's moral and health benefits; around 1998 State Sports Administration of China estimated over 70 million people practiced Falun Dafa. Master Li accepted a proclamation from the City of Houston, Texas, USA, which declared October 12, 1996 "Li Hongzhi Day." At the same time, the city also named Master Li an Honorary Citizen and Goodwill Ambassador [57]. In 2007, Master Li was ranked as one of the Top 100 Chinese Talents in the World, and he was awarded the Outstanding Spirit Leader Award in 2009. He has received over 3000 letters of citations, proclamations, and awards (Figure 3).

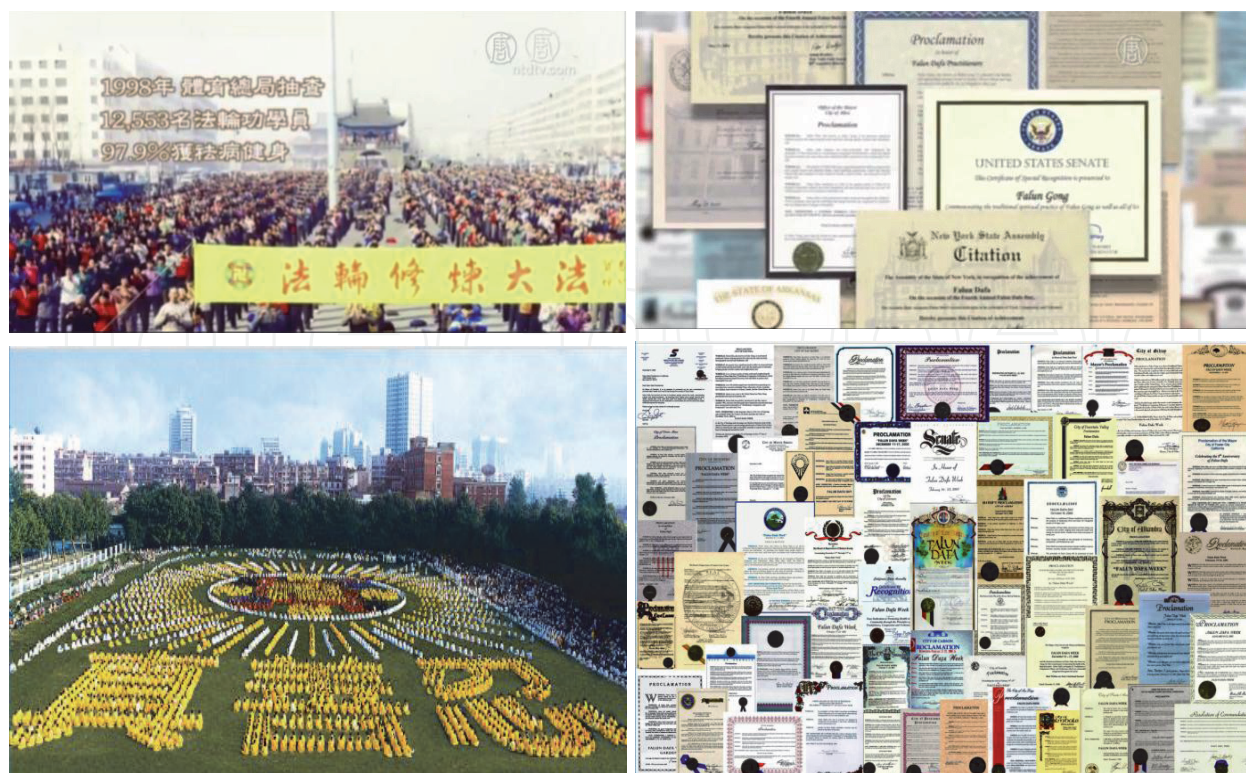


Figure 3. Photos of Falun Dafa practitioners in China (practicing) (left side), and pictures (right side) of proclamations, and awards etc. from worldwide to Master Li and Falun Dafa. Upper left one showed Falun Dafa practitioners in Shuangcheng city, China were doing group practicing; while down left one showing five thousand people practicing in Wuhan city, China, forming the Chinese characters for Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance (1998). Refer [58].

4.1. Zhen, Shan, Ren (Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance)—the foundation of practice

Falun Dafa's basic tenets are based on ancient cultivation practices. In China, cultivation has a history that is much longer than that of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. The ancient wisdom of cultivation, including those ideas expressed in Falun Gong, may far precede all the religions we observe today, based on unearthed archaeological relics. Falun Dafa is an advanced practice of Buddha school self-cultivation, founded in China by Master Li. It is a discipline in which "assimilation to the highest qualities of the universe—Truthfulness (Zhen 真), Compassion (Shan 善), Forbearance (Ren 忍), is the foundation of practice. Practice is guided by these supreme qualities, and based on the very laws which underlie the development of the cosmos." Master Li's teachings are set forth in a number of texts, among which are included Falun Gong, Zhuan Falun, The Great Perfection Way of Falun Dafa, Essentials for Further Advancement, and Hong Yin (The Grand Verses). These and other works have been translated into 38 languages now, and are published and distributed worldwide. The focus of Falun Dafa practice is the mind, with the cultivation of one's mind and thoughts, or "*Xinxing*" (expressed as "Character" in the text Falun Gong), being singled out as the key to increasing Gong energy. The height of a person's Gong is directly proportionate to that of his *Xinxing*. The concept of "*Xinxing*" encompasses the transformation of virtue (a white form of matter) and karma (a black form of matter). It also includes forbearance, discernment, and abandonment—that is, forsaking ordinary human

desires and attachments, and managing to endure the most trying of ordeals. Much is encompassed by the concept. Falun Dafa also includes the cultivation of the body, which is accomplished by performing specific exercises, including five sets of exercises (and the fifth is the comprehensive sitting exercise, meditation (see in below)). One purpose of the exercises is to strengthen the practitioner's supernatural abilities and energy mechanisms by means of his or her powerful Gong force [58].

4.2. Its relation to well-being

First introduced to the public by Master Li in 1992, the practice nowadays has gained more than 100 million practitioners of all ages and backgrounds in over 100 countries, including the United States (**Figure 4**). In Taiwan, the number of Falun Dafa practitioners increased from 3000 in 1999 to over 300,000 in a dozen of years ago [59]. Taiwan's former Vice President went in 2002, to a Falun Dafa conference to give a congratulatory speech so as to acknowledge the positive contributions of Falun Gong has brought to the well-being of the people of Taiwan [60].

Practitioners around the globe are presenting how Falun Dafa has brought positive changes to those who practice this advanced self-cultivation. As early as 1996, a survey report titled "A report on the effect of Falun Gong in curing diseases and keeping fit based on a survey of 355 cultivators of Falun Gong at certain sites in Beijing, China" was completed and delivered [61]. On May 15, 1998, the then director of the State Sports Bureau of China went to Changchun City,



Figure 4. Falun Dafa practitioners in all over the world. Left, practitioners in Washington DC (upper), little disciples of Falun Dafa at an elementary school in Taiwan; Middle, in France, UK, Netherland, and Spain; Right, in Mexico City (Forum on Falun Gong Held in Chamber of Deputies). (Refer [58])

Jilin province, where Falun Dafa originated, to conduct an investigation into the practice. Then the Bureau surveyed 12,553 Falun Dafa practitioners and found that the illness healing rate was 77.5%. Adding 20.4% who reported experiencing improvement in their overall health, the overall effective rate was 97.9%. Each person on average saved more than RMB ¥1700 of medical bills each year. The yearly saving was RMB ¥21 million and even more. Following the teachings of Falun Dafa, genuine practitioners constantly raise their *Xinxing* (or mind-nature and morality), besides practicing exercises. As a result, they have gained both physical and mental health and much more. With an average annual savings of RMB ¥3270 (~US \$654) per capita estimated, over 100 million practitioners worldwide have cut healthcare costs tremendously. People can find that six independent reports online summarized provide a more detailed picture of the healing efficacy of Falun Dafa. There were at least 10 surveys with definite sample size (**Table 1**) [62–65], as well as numerous individual and/or summary case reports.

The book “A Journey to Ultimate Health” edited by William McCoy, MD, Lijuan Zhang, MD, PhD many years ago [64] was composed of 40 vivid cultivation stories. Those were made revisions and adjustments so as to include only the parts relevant to health improvement. Since health improvement in all persons cannot be separated from changes in their situation of cultivation practicing, cases were purposely kept the content in some stories that described improvement in practitioners’ moral character. All the stories depict the circumstances at the time they were written, which were specified after each story. Among 39 practitioners, 27 of them were residing in North America, five in Taiwan, three in Mainland China, two in Australia, and two in Europe. Actually they came from a wide scope of backgrounds, from a 10-year-old school student to retirees of over 70 ages, from housewives to highly educated professionals (including engineers and medical doctors). For the goal of better bridging the readers into the stories, editors of the book discussed some about the relationship between modern medicine with the disease-healing effects obtained from practicing Falun Dafa. The cases described were all so impressive, while two of them are attached in this text. One of them is: A 46-year-old male was very unhealthy for a long time before discovering Falun Dafa. He had multiple diseases and syndromes such as Petit mal seizure (from 10 years old, also causing fainting spells, migraines), depression, being unable to properly chew food, learning disabilities, autistic tendency, sleep apnea, and a foot injury that severely limited his range of motion. After he had started to do Falun Dafa practicing for 6 months, his ability to stand and support himself improved significantly. His medical support group has been surprised by his change. One physician who had been following his progress for some time concluded that Falun Dafa contributed to putting him back on his feet. A member of staff in the hospital was moved to tears by his progress.

Another one is about a 13-years-old seventh grade student in Toronto, Canada. She came from China with her parents in 1996. When she was 6 months old, it was discovered that her spleen and liver were severely enlarged and hardened. Doctors indicated that her case was rare. She could eat little, and was skinny and sick. She was much shorter than average for her age and was easily fatigued after just a short walk. Chinese and Western medicine became her daily meals. She was encouraged to do Falun Dafa practicing when she was 9 years old. Then she got rid of the “incurable” disease. She became a healthy middle-school student and a young, sincere Falun Dafa practitioner.

Survey name	Year	Sample size (and basic information)*	Methods	Results	Significances	Notes
A report on the effect of Falun Gong in curing diseases and keeping fit based on a survey of 355 cultivators of Falun Gong at certain sites in Beijing, China	1996	355	On a voluntary basis, the sample was asked to complete the questionnaires in person.	Complete or partial disappearance of diseases of Falun Gong practitioners after their practicing. The average rate of disappearance of diseases is 79.4%.	The medical costs of the cultivators reduced greatly; therefore, both social effect and economic benefits have been achieved.	By Zhang, Rongjia, The College of the Basic Courses, Beijing Medical University Xiao, Jun, the Institute of Environmental Sanitation and Sanitation Engineering, Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine, China [61]
The State Sports Bureau Survey (China)	1998	12,553	Pending further investigation	The illness healing rate 77.5% was shown in the survey and the overall effective rate could be 97.9% when adding 20.4% from those practitioners who reported experiencing improvement in their overall health.	Each person on average saved more than RMB ¥1700 of medical bills annually, then the yearly saving would be RMB ¥21 million and even more.	Government organized. Refer [62]
The Beijing Survey Report (China)	1998	12,731	The participants voluntarily filled out the self-evaluated health status questionnaires according to instructions.	After practicing Falun Gong, 58.5%, or 6962 people recovered from their illnesses completely, and 24.9%, or 2956 people, had a general recovery. The overall efficacy rate of Falun Gong was thus 99.1%.	The overall efficacy rate of Falun Gong was thus 99.1%.	Researchers did a survey over five districts in Beijing (Xicheng District, Chongwen District, Dongcheng City, Xuanwu District and Chaoyang District). Refer [62]
Survey Report from Wuhan City (China)	1998	2005	A random sampling, at over 50 practice sites within three	75.15% had their health problems resolved, while 23.3% found that their	37 participants had spent more than RMB ¥10,000 annually on medical	Refer [62]

Survey name	Year	Sample size (and basic information)*	Methods	Results	Significances	Notes
			districts of the three main towns in Wuhan City	conditions had improved. (1899 or 94.7%, had different kinds of health problems prior to practicing cultivation.)	expenses before, but through practicing Falun DaFa, they have became illness- free and most of them have stopped visiting their physicians and/or taking medicine. Based on to the survey results, 95.51% of these people had no need to use their medical insurance benefits.	
Survey of over 6000 Cultivators in Dalian, Liaoning Province (China)	1998	6478	A health status survey	92% reported total disappearance of the symptoms, 7.74% observed moderate improvement; the disease recovery rate shows no major difference among practitioners with multiple illnesses or with a single illness, which are 89.73% and 88.83% respectively.	6192 participants (95.59%) of them suffered various diseases and medical conditions of the cardiovascular system, nervous system, digestive system, respiratory system, urogenital system, hemic and immune system or musculoskeletal system. It is very interesting to note that those who achieved the best results didn't use any medical treatment at all.	Refer [62]
North American Survey Report	1999	235	A small-scale survey (questionnaires)	224 practitioners, or 97%, had great health improvements after the practice	The first one in North America.	Inspired by results of Falun Gong health surveys conducted in China, several

Survey name	Year	Sample size (and basic information)*	Methods	Results	Significances	Notes
				(230 surveyed practitioners returned questionnaires with complete health records before their practice, and 226 practitioners turned in complete records after they began the practice); 103 practitioners consumed alcohol before the practice, 100 of them quit drinking after taking up the practice.		medical researchers conducted a small-scale survey of practitioners in USA and Canada. Refer [62]
Russian Survey Report	2001	12 practitioners out of 32 candidates (took random samples) ; Two of them practiced Falun Gong for over 1 year and 11 for over 2 years.	Investigations covered the following aspects: Cultivators' medical records, the health index of practitioners before and after cultivation, the contents of Falun Gong, and the daily lives of those who practice Falun Gong.	After they began practicing Falun Gong practitioners reported no more complaints of ailments. Blood and urine tests were all normal. Physical examinations showed no abnormalities. All subjects showed normal mental states—positive, responsible, easy to get along with. (The subjects all suffered some illnesses before cultivation. Three had stomach ulcers or infections. One had an internal hormone imbalance. One	The subjects' subjective opinion: Practicing Falun DaFa improved their physical and mental health. The investigating team's conclusion: (1) The effective rate of Falun DaFa in healing illnesses and improving health is 75%; (2) The medical examination of Falun DaFa practitioners showed that cultivation practicing had made remarkable improvement in one's physical and mental condition; and (3) Falun DaFa	Senior forensic specialist, Professor Guluoqi of the Forensic Office of the Russian Internal Department, and Principal Forensic Doctor Simintani of the Judicial Forensic Bureau teamed up to conduct the survey. Refer [62]

Survey name	Year	Sample size (and basic information)*	Methods	Results	Significances	Notes
				had respiratory tract problems. Eight of them had relationship difficulties with their families or coworkers, and they were depressed and tired easily.)	has no negative physical or mental effects.	
Survey Report from Taiwan	2002	1210	By way of a stratified sampling, with questionnaires distribution (selecting 20% of towns and cities for the research)	81% of the respondents quit smoking, 77% quit drinking, 85% quit gambling, and 85% also completely stopped their habit of chewing betel nuts. The satisfaction rate regarding personal health increased from 24% prior to practicing to 78% after practicing, and the rate concerning carrying out daily activities increased from 36% to 81%.	Falun Dafa offered great psychological and mental benefits.	A survey completed by Dr. Hu Yuhui from the Department of Economics at National Taiwan University. Refer [62]
Australian Survey	2016	590 (360 FG & 230 non-FG respondents); Chinese: 47%, n = 170; Caucasians: 24%, n = 88; Australians: 7%, n = 26 (and totally from 29 countries); Males: 42%, n = 151; Females: 57%, n = 206	2 questionnaires	91%, improving <i>Xinxing</i> or moral character based on the principles of Falun Dafa practice; 44%, positive change of attitude towards life since practicing Falun DaFa.	The first one including participants in so many countries worldwide.	Refer [63]

Survey name	Year	Sample size (and basic information)*	Methods	Results	Significances	Notes
Others Other surveys Cases reports	Around 1999	Pending further investigation (at least on Changchu, Nanchang, Guangxi, Anhui, Tianjin data, and other surveys performed earlier by Beijing practitioners)** 39	Pending further investigation	Pending further investigation Mind and body improvement in all cultivators of the group.	Genuine practitioners constantly raise their <i>Xinxing</i> , besides practicing exercises of Falun Dafa.	“Pending further investigation” due to persecution starting from July 1999; Refer [64, 65, 89]; for individual case, refer dataset through the website (www. minghui.org)

* indicated that the total number being about 36, 208 cases (except ** that included cases number in China still being collected).

Table 1. Nine Survey results from China, North America, Russia Taiwan and Australia as well as many case reports about Falun Dafa practitioners.

The health benefits commonly experienced by Falun Dafa practitioners are very scientific and revealed the intimate link between mind-body-spirit manifested at the molecular level. Scientists have performed some investigations in this field, which provide evidence-based information. A team in University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Baylor College of Medicine, Houston initiated a set of studies in 2005 [8] with gene expression differences investigated in the neutrophils of six Falun Dafa practitioners (who had practiced the program for at least 1 year doing daily book reading [66] and daily Falun Dafa exercises lasting 1–2 hours each time), comparing them with a control group of six healthy Asian candidates. Among the approximately 12,000 genes interrogated by microarrays (when the neutrophils isolated from fresh blood with detecting gene expression profiling), 250 genes consistently showed difference in expression between the Falun Dafa practitioners and the control group, with 132 down regulated and 118 up regulated genes. Cellular stress response genes were generally down regulated in Falun Dafa practitioners compared to the control group, but the expression of two of the heat shock proteins was increased. Expressions of some genes that are related to immunity were also increased in the Falun Dafa practitioners’ group, such as interferon gamma (IFN-g) and IFN-related and IFN-regulated genes. Results showed that the cells of Falun Dafa practitioners exhibited drastic reduction of metabolism, a key feature of longevity, and enhanced anti-bacteria function at the cellular level; at the molecular level, an advanced biological technique was applied and yielded clean-cut results that demonstrated drastic down-regulation of stress response genes as well as proteins involved in protein synthesis and protein degradation. The studies showed that the ubiquitin (characterized as a stress-inducible protein) [67, 68] related pathways and apoptosis can be affected, suggesting that Falun Dafa practices give rise to gene expression changes consistent with improved response to environmental stress, and improve the survival of immune cells (Figure 5).

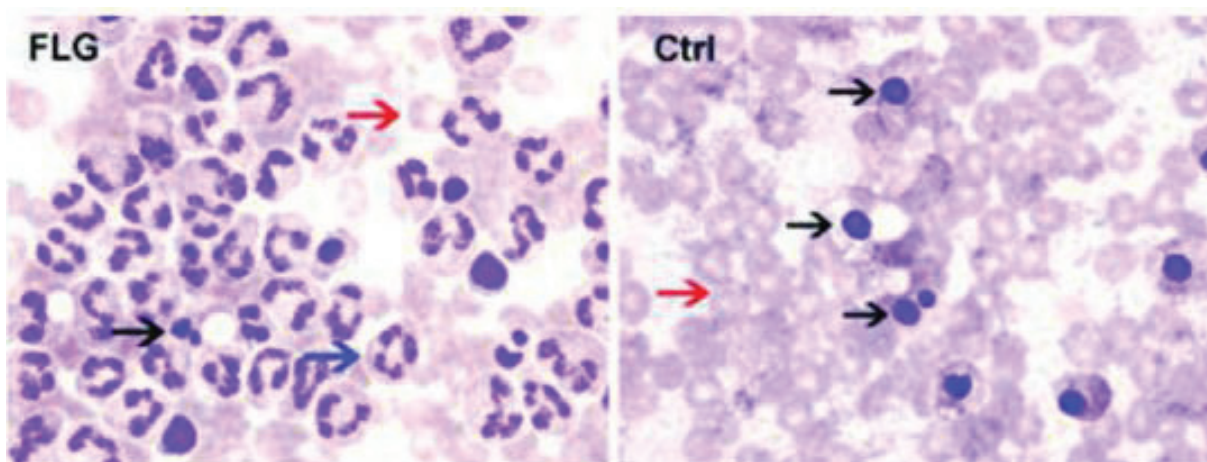


Figure 5. Micrographic photos of altered neutrophil apoptosis in the absence of lipopolysaccharide (LPS) after 16-hour culture.

Because delayed neutrophil apoptosis has been linked to a number of chronic inflammatory injuries resulting from enhanced immunity [69], the authors interpreted those data above as beneficial, in terms of the effects on immunity, metabolic rate, and apoptosis through modulating gene. Their finding that Falun Dafa practices lead to resending gene expression changes is consistent with the finding in the aforementioned surveys conducted among practitioners. Their studies also indicate that modern technology may be used as a scientific tool to study the molecular mechanism of health benefits seen in people practicing spirituality or employing complementary and alternative medicine (**Figure 5**) [8, 70].

Most of the neutrophils from a Falun Gong practitioner (left) were alive without apoptosis in the absence of LPS. In contrast, neutrophils from a normal control (right) were apoptotic. (Blue arrow, normal neutrophils; black arrow, apoptotic cell indicated as shrunken neutrophils with chromatin condensation, rounded nuclear profiles, and presence of cytoplasmic vacuolization; red arrow, red blood cell.) Wright-Giemsa stain. Original magnification: $\times 400$. (Refer [70])

(Most of the neutrophils, when stimulated with LPS (25 ng/mL), were apoptotic in the Falun Gong practitioner but alive in the normal control. Refer [8])

A research outcome entitled “Study at Cellular Level on the Psychological and Physical Healing Effects of Falun Dafa Meditation” (by Jason Liu and Gwendalle Cooper) was presented at the 65th Annual International Council of Psychologists (ICP) Conference, held at San Diego in August 2007 [71]. Psychologists from around the world shared their results probing the relationship between mental health and environment, and the scope of research is to promote multi-cultural relations, peace between ethnic groups, as well as health. Dr. Liu talked about his research on how Falun Dafa improved practitioners’ situation at the cellular, psychological and energetic levels. His data showed practicing Falun Dafa helped significantly in reducing practitioners’ mental stress, improving their mental and physical health, healing diseases, enhancing mental and moral levels, and developing human potential and intelligence.

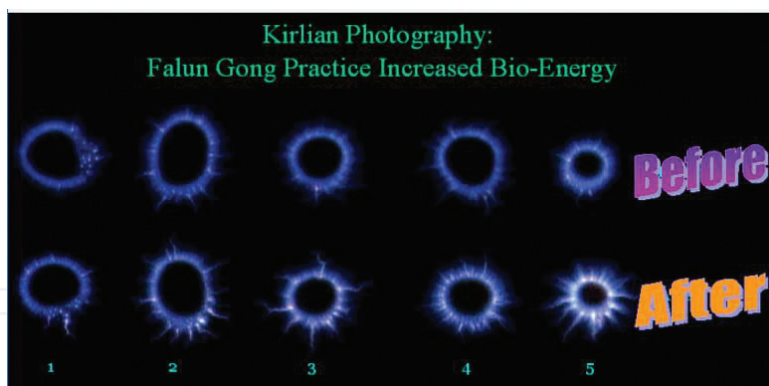


Figure 6. Bio-energy photography showed that practicing Falun Dafa was able to intensify people's energy field and to improve energy circulation in the human body. The numbers 1–5 were bio-energy photographs taken of a practitioner's thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and small finger (left hand). The bio-energy on the right hand was the same and was not shown in the picture.

Dr. Liu carefully analyzed his results from different scientific point of views. One kind of results (**Figure 6**) showed bio-energy photography taken of a practitioner's fingers before and after an hour-long meditation. The photography was taken with a commonly used high-voltage high-frequency Kirlian CV6000 photoelectric technology with a Sony DCR-VX2000 NTSC camera. It indicated that bio-energy in a practitioner's finger increased significantly after meditating for an hour, means better peripheral circulation. The 10 fingers connected peripheral meridians and acupuncture points. This experiment proved the practice opens the body's meridians and increases life energy. The results provided scientific evidence of health benefits of Falun Dafa from the perspectives of energy medicine and Chinese medicine.

During the psychological experiment, the Heart Math Monitor developed by the Heart Math Institute was utilized by Dr. Liu to record and calculates the Heart-Brain Entrainment ratio of a practitioner in the process of meditation. The ratio was used as an index of mental health and showed whether a person's mind was pure and in harmony with the person's body. The result indicated that practitioners' Heart-Brain Entrainment Ratio went from 40% before practicing to 94% after practicing. It demonstrated that practitioners, after improving their personality and mind in cultivation, experience enhanced mental clarity.

The research on the healing power of Falun Dafa added an alternative approach to modern science and medicine. It created opportunities in the future to introduce people to a purer insight of the real meaning of life within the greater context of the universe—and the science behind cultivating a human life. Liu's research also focuses on combining modern technology and traditional natural healing methods from China such as meditation, hypnosis, music and energy to heal illnesses. This research got a warm welcome from the psychologists in the conference. The study and other works by Dr. Liu have extended to a book published [72].

It has been reported that Falun Dafa exhibits very dramatic and powerful effects on practitioners. Falun Dafa practitioners have shared amply about the kinds of benefits they have experienced through doing the practice. One recent case [73, 74], for example, was about how a 67-year-old female practitioner recovered from suffering complex fractures at her right leg and foot—knee joint fracture (comminuted fracture of proximal end of tibia) with articular

surface involved, and ankle joint fracture (trimellolar fracture, comminuted fracture) with multiple fragments, as well as cuboid bone fracture due to a traffic accident. This lady's fractures appeared a great degree of recovery after she has diligently practiced Falun Dafa exercises in home for 46 days (showing visualized fracture healing), without receiving any formal orthopedic intervention treatment. She then has had entire recovery, and afterwards participated in Falun Dafa related memorial events in New York City, USA in May 2016, and marched in the 17th World Falun Dafa Day parade after travelling internationally from her home all by herself (a little more than half year after the traffic accident) (**Figure 7**).

During the 2016 ASCO Annual Meeting held from June 3 to June 7, a group of investigators presented their results of an observational cohort study on terminal cancer survivors practicing Falun Dafa in China [75]. After 152 terminal cases (predicted survival, $PS \leq 12$ months, using the NIH SEER data if the treating physician's Clinical Prediction of Survival (CPS) was unavailable) of Chinese cancer patients between 2000 and 2015 in China were collected through a web platform's (www.minghui.org) database searching function, and the participating candidates deemed eligible for the quality of life (QoL) evaluation, Falun Dafa practitioners' data who have had different types of primary tumor, such as cancer in lung ($n = 38$), liver ($n = 29$), stomach ($n = 17$), leukemia ($n = 12$), esophagus ($n = 10$), gynecological ($n = 9$), pancreas/bile duct ($n = 8$), colorectal ($n = 7$), and other organs ($n = 22$), were included. They found, as of the report date, 149 patients were still alive, among this 152 Chinese cohort (the onset age was 53.3 ± 15.6 years; the Falun Dafa practice duration was 53.1 ± 58.9 months), with excited values in several parameters like, time to effect was 1.3 ± 1.7 months, time to symptom recovery was 3.6 ± 3.3 months, and symptom free survival (SFS) was 52.7 ± 61.1 months. A total of 147 patients (96.7%) reported complete symptom recovery with 60 patients confirmed by treating physicians, and QoL after Falun Dafa practice was significantly improved. Investigators drew the interim conclusion that terminal cancer patients practicing the advanced self-cultivation practice survive significantly longer, in addition to seeing notable improvement in cancer symptoms, and they continue to make more profound observations in related investigations on a broader range.

Modern medicine tended to believe that human illnesses were caused by social, environmental, and biological factors. These three factors, to a large extent, affected the body's system through mental impact, which eventually led to illnesses or a generally unhealthy physical condition. This showed that psychology was an important factor regarding one's health.

4.3. Achievement of well-being

Just like what was mentioned in the survey report drawn up by The Chinese National Sports Bureau in 1998, "The unusual phenomena exhibiting among Falun Gong practitioners indicated that Falun Dafa has extraordinary supernormal power. In summary, the unusual phenomena observed among Falun Dafa practitioners far exceeds what can be explained by modern medicine. These phenomena deserve thorough discussions and researches by the medical and scientific communities. It has a very positive impact toward improving the physical and mental well-being of all people, and suggests an all new possibility for the further advancement of science" [62].



Figure 7. A report (with X-ray and CT images) on the effect of Falun Dafa practicing in curing multiple-site comminuted fractures (at 67 years old female's body due to traffic accident). Lower left, complex fractures (on November 7, 2015) shown at the senior lady's right leg and foot—knee joint fracture (comminuted fracture of proximal end of tibia) with articular surface involved, and ankle joint fracture (trimellolar fracture, comminuted fracture) with multiple fragments, as well as cuboid bone fracture (not shown), lower right, showing visualized fracture healing on her knee and ankle joints X-ray images (on December 4, 2015); upper left, showing (on December 23, 2015) almost disappearance of fracture line at her right knee joint (ankle joint not shown), upper right, presenting a picture on which her healthy status was obvious when she (left two) has marched in the 17th World Falun Dafa Day parade at New York city (May 13, 2016) with her old friends. (Refer [73, 74].)

From our point of view, practicing Falun Dafa is about achieving a state of holistic well-being. Curing illnesses is not the goal of practicing Falun Dafa, since the practice is a spiritual cultivation of both the mind and body.

One of the distinctive features of Falun Dafa cultivation is that it puts elevating one's mental state as the top priority in one's cultivation. It requires practitioners to follow the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, in order to truly improve one's mental state by elevating moral character. This will in turn allow one to reach an ideal physical state. By cultivating one's inner state of mind as well as doing physical exercises, achieving physical health is a natural outcome. In addition, cultivating in Falun Dafa helps end harmful addictions, improve one's social capabilities, and thus generate an overall positive social impact.

Aside from the power of healing illness and improving health as discussed above, Falun Dafa emphasizes improving one's moral character, and guides practitioners to become more honest, kind, tolerant, and peaceful. Its discourse lays emphasis on looking inward when faced with conflicts, be considerate of others, put others first with kindness, and help those in need. The teachings of Falun Dafa can guide a dedicated practitioner to an advanced, transcendent state.

4.4. Practice is free of charge and easy to begin

4.4.1. General information

Falun Dafa practice begins at a high plane right from the outset, thus providing the most expedient, fast, ideal, and precious means of practice for those with a predestined connection or who have been practicing for years using other means but failed to develop Gong.

Falun Dafa practice is an advanced self-cultivation practice. The Chinese word for cultivation is “修炼” (“Xiulian”) and it was used to describe those ancient practices which had adopted religious-sounding names. In the aftermath of the “Cultural Revolution” in China, however, people saw that using the word “Xiulian” could lead to trouble from the authorities, they therefore formulated a new word, “qigong,” a term made up of two words that were more acceptable: “Qi” (pronounced “chee”), meaning universal life energy, and “Gong,” meaning cultivation energy, which is a higher and more refined substance than Qi.

In the text FALUN GONG [76], Master Li said:

“Falun Gong is Buddhist qigong, but it far exceeds the scope of the Buddhist system: what we cultivate is the entire universe. In the past, Buddhist cultivation only taught Buddhist principles, while Daoist cultivation only taught Daoist principles. Neither one gave a full explanation of the universe from its fundamental level. The universe is similar to human beings in that it has its own nature, along with its material composition. Its nature can be summarized in three words: Zhen, Shan, Ren ((‘juhn, shahn, ren’). Zhen means ‘true, truth, real, truthfulness’; Shan, ‘compassion, benevolence, kindness, goodness’; Ren, ‘fortitude, forbearance, endurance, tolerance, patience, self-restraint, self-control’). Daoist cultivation focuses its understanding on the Zhen part: telling the truth, doing truthful deeds, returning to one’s original, true self, and finally becoming a true

being. Buddhist cultivation focuses on the Shan part: developing great compassion, and offering salvation to all beings. With our discipline, we work on all three of Zhen, Shan, and Ren, and we directly adhere to the fundamental nature of the universe in our cultivation, ultimately assimilating with the universe.”

Master Li’s teachings are set forth in a number of texts, among which are included Falun Gong, Zhuan Falun, The Great Perfection Way of Falun Dafa, Essentials for Further Advancement, and Hong Yin (The Grand Verses). These and other works have been translated into 38 languages and are published and distributed worldwide [58, 66].

The focus of Falun Dafa practice is the mind, with the cultivation of one’s mind and thoughts, or “*Xinxing*,” being singled out as the key to increasing Gong energy. The height of a person’s Gong is directly proportionate to that of his (or her) *Xinxing*. The concept of “*Xinxing*” encompasses the transformation of virtue (a white form of matter) and karma (a black form of matter). It also includes forbearance, discernment, and abandonment—that is, forsaking ordinary human desires and attachments, and managing to endure the most trying of ordeals. Much is encompassed by the concept.

Falun Dafa also includes the cultivation of the body, which is accomplished by performing specific exercises. One purpose of the exercises is to strengthen the practitioner’s supernatural abilities and energy mechanisms by means of his or her powerful Gong force. Another purpose is to develop many living entities in the practitioner’s body. In advanced practice, the Immortal Infant will come into being and many abilities will be developed. The exercises of Falun Dafa are necessary for the transformation and cultivation of such things. A comprehensive mind-body cultivation system such as this requires both self-cultivation and physical exercises, with cultivation taking priority over exercises. A person’s Gong simply will not increase if he or she merely does exercises while failing to cultivate *Xinxing*. The exercises are thus a supplemental means to achieving spiritual perfection.

Falun Dafa “brings a person to a state of wisdom and harmonious existence. The movements of the practice are concise, as a great way is extremely simple and easy” [58]. Falun Dafa is unique in eight ways:

1. A Falun is cultivated, rather than an energy elixir;
2. The Falun refines the person even when he or she is not doing the practice’s exercises;
3. One’s primary consciousness is cultivated, such that it is the person him or herself who obtains Gong energy;
4. Both mind and body are cultivated;
5. The practice consists of five exercises, which are simple and easy to learn;
6. The mind is not used to direct anything, there are no associated risks, and Gong energy increases quickly;
7. Location, time, and direction are not of concern when exercising, nor is how one concludes one’s exercise session;

8. Protection is provided by the master's Fashen, so one needn't fear harm from malevolent entities.

The five sets of exercises include: The First Exercise, Buddha Stretching a Thousand Arms; The Second Exercise, Falun Standing Stance; The Third Exercise, Penetrating the Cosmic Extremes; The Fourth Exercise, Falun Cosmic Orbit; The Fifth Exercise, Reinforcing Supernatural Powers (refer to The Great Perfection Way of Falun Dafa) [66].

Especially after the main text Zhuan Falun was published in 1995, under most circumstances, people in China learned of Falun Dafa by the sharing of information among individuals, meaning word-of-mouth sharing out of goodwill. Reading books is always the first step. Practitioners who began the practice earlier than others voluntarily set up exercise sites at locations such as neighborhood parks, formed home-based Zhuan Falun studying groups, and practitioners shared studying experiences. Practitioners spontaneously came together to do exercises in groups of varying sizes in parks or other neighborhood venues in the morning and during weekend. Coworkers from the same working place often did exercises together during break time or lunch time. Master Li travelled and gave lectures in Europe, other parts of Asia, and Australia. Since 1996, he has only made public appearances to speak at annual Experience-Sharing Conferences at the invitation of practitioners around the world, including North America. Aside from those occasions, Master Li prefers to live a private life so as not to interfere with practitioners' cultivation practice [55].

With a heart of compassion, practitioners of Falun Dafa around the world are spreading the word about this advanced self-cultivation practice to the public through various means. For instance, the Falun Dafa Club at Columbia University (in USA), established in August 1999, hosts an annual information exhibition event on campus from October 17 to 20 to inform the truth about Falun Dafa to staff, students, and visitors alike. And recently, the student-run Falun Dafa Club at the University of the West of England (in UK) participated in the annual Fresher Fair on September 16, 2016 for the second time, and nearly 140 people registered to join the club [77, 78].

Regardless of how one learns of the practice, it's easy to find more information by going online to Falun Dafa's official website, and access books, and audio and video files on the teachings of Falun Dafa free of charge. This is a good approach for individuals to be introduced to the practice. Sometimes, friends or acquaintances who have already begun the practice often offer newcomers with suggestions or recommendations on how to go about with the practice.

The exercises have characteristics of being natural, slow and smooth without any strenuous movements. They are very good for people of all ages (including young children). A 12-year-old boy in Toronto, when asked recently what Falun Dafa had done for him, said, "I used to like to boss around the other kids at school, but I don't want to do that anymore." Many practitioners enjoy practicing with a group because of the strong energy field that is generated, which radiates peace and serenity. Chances are, you might have seen practitioners doing exercises early in the morning in a park close to your home.

It was estimated that since years ago, there had already been several thousand people in Canada practicing Falun Dafa. And in most major cities, one can find Falun Dafa information

centers and practice sites. Through learning and practicing Falun Dafa, practitioners have improved their health, relieved the stress in their lives, uplifted their moral and ethical standards and are achieving gradual spiritual enlightenment.

In India, after Falun Dafa was introduced to the Department of Public Instruction, Karnataka, the Commissioner expressed a keen interest in introducing Falun Dafa to all primary school teachers in the state. On January 17–18, 2012, the director of the Department of State Education and Research Training and the principal and deputy director of Public Instruction in Bangalore organized a pilot program to introduce Falun Dafa to the coordinators of the government schoolteachers. The program was conducted by six practitioners at the District Institute of Education and Training, Bangalore. It was attended by 70 teachers from the rural districts of Karnataka. Through a presentation, practitioners shared their understandings. The five sets of exercises were then taught to the entire group. The next day, additional teachings of the exercises were conducted in smaller groups to ensure accuracy of the movements, followed by group reading of *Lunyu* (*On Dafa*, Master Li's recent article) [79] and a portion of Lecture One of the main book *Zhuan Falun*. The participants were happy to learn and experience Falun Dafa. Over the 2 days, they experienced peace and harmony through the practice. They said that they felt energy was being activated in their bodies and expressed their happiness at being introduced to this wonderful cultivation practice. Most of them said in their written feedback that Falun Dafa seemed very good for them and that they will spread the practice to the schools under their jurisdiction [80].

The above was an example showing that, local practitioners sharing what they have achieved through the practice to the person-in-charge of an institute (or an organization), so that more people could get the chance of being introduced to the principles of Falun Dafa. It should also be noted that in the context of this scenario, the term “program” only refers to the various means with which practitioners introduced the practice of Falun Dafa to others over a 2-day duration, rather than a fixed curriculum practitioners follow.

The practice is completely voluntary, where people choose to take part in practice-related activities (or not) of their own free will. This is adhered to by Falun Dafa practitioners around the world. Therefore, there is no real sense of “joining a program” other than the fact that anyone who thinks of himself or herself as a dedicated practitioner studies Falun Dafa texts and does the exercises regularly. Additionally, practitioners can set up teaching program for children and teenagers for free to learn more about traditional Chinese culture, give aid in their studying of the main book *Zhuan Falun*.

In view of the above, we have chosen the term “scenario” to describe in below some of the ways with which practitioners around the world study and advance themselves in Falun Dafa.

4.4.2. Several scenarios

After the year 1999, in countries and regions outside of China, the most commonly seen scenario is as follows: practitioners having the available time and a strong sense of community often volunteer to set up exercise sites so that other practitioners from the neighborhood could do the exercises in group. Such exercise sites, since they are mostly public venues, also serve

the function of introducing the practice to interested individuals whose first encounter of Falun Dafa are usually seeing practitioners doing group exercises at public venues. For those who are new to the practice and the exercises, more experienced practitioners could assist the newcomers in studying the texts and making sure they are doing the exercises correctly. Such group activities also make it easy for practitioners to share their cultivation experience in a group setting.

In the scenario where an interested individual has some kind of disability or is suffering from illness and cannot do the exercises due to his/her physical condition, other practitioners could instead introduce Master Li's main book *Zhuan Falun* to such individuals for them to get started in the practice.

When an individual studies the texts of Falun Dafa regularly and has made up his or her mind to follow the principles of Truthfulness-Benevolence-Forbearance, the individual becomes a practitioner and is enlightened to the essence of this advanced self-cultivation practice as long as he/she remains a genuine practitioner.

Master Li said, in the book of "The Great Way of Spiritual Perfection":

"Falun Dafa cultivators must cultivate their character, along with performing the movements. Those who focus solely on the exercises but neglect character cultivation will not be acknowledged as Falun Dafa disciples. Dafa students thus need to make studying the Law and reading the books the essential part of their daily cultivation" [81].

Falun Dafa practitioners strive to become better people through improving "*Xinxing*" ("心性," in Chinese), a term generally translated as "character" (perhaps initially understood as "heart-nature"). By placing others before themselves and letting go of material and emotional attachments, practitioners of Falun Dafa continue the Daoist tradition of non-intention or the Buddhist creed of giving up worldly desires. Like what has been discussed before, the cultivation of one's mind and thoughts will be regarded as the top priority in one's practice.

Many raise this question: if a student who studies Falun Dafa mainly focuses on doing the exercises, could he/she advance in the practice without putting effort into cultivating one's *Xinxing*? We should think about this: those who only focus on doing the exercises will eventually observe a disparity between their overall status and the achievement of genuine well-being.

It is very interesting to note that in the survey results listed above, those who achieved the best results didn't use any medical treatment. They did not administer alternative medicine, take vitamin or mineral supplements, or other natural health products. The application of such products may be considered as being inconsistent with the advanced self-cultivation and may even disrupt practitioners' health improvement process.

When a Falun Dafa disciple's *Xinxing* and the strength of his or her Gong reach a certain height, he or she can attain an imperishable, adamant body while still in the secular world. A person can also achieve the "unlocking of Gong," enlightenment, and ascension of the whole

person to higher planes. Those with great determination should study this upright teaching, strive to achieve their ultimate rank, elevate their *Xinxing*, and forsake their attachments. Only then is spiritual perfection possible.

In the text FALUN GONG, Master Li said:

“It is easy to be a good person, but it’s not easy to cultivate character—a cultivator must ready his mind. Sincerity is a prerequisite if you are to rectify your mind. People live in a world where society has become complicated. Though you might want to do good things, there might be some people who don’t want you to; you might not want to harm others, but others might harm you for various reasons. Some of these things happen for unapparent reasons. Will you be able to enlighten to the reasons? Then what should you do? The challenges in this world test your character at every moment. When experiencing indescribable humiliation, when losing out, when tempted by money and lust, when in a power struggle, when rage and jealousy emerge in conflicts, when discord in society and in the family take place, and when experiencing all kinds of hardships, can you always follow closely the character criteria? Of course, if you could handle everything then you would already be an enlightened being. Most practitioners start as everyday people after all, and the cultivation of their character occurs gradually; it moves upward little by little. Determined cultivators will eventually gain a Noble Attainment (*zheng-guo*) if they are prepared to endure great hardships and face ordeals with an unwavering mind.” [82]

In China today, the scenario is notably different due to the nationwide and state sanctioned persecution against Falun Dafa, which began in full swing since July 20, 1999 [83]. Prior to the onset of the persecution, practitioners in China studied the texts of Falun Dafa and did the exercises often in groups and in public venues much in the same way as those in the rest of the world, as described in the scenarios above. The persecution could be partially explained by the Chinese Communist Regime’s (the CCP’s) inherent tendency to control and suppress all individuals and groups that adhere to a different set of ideologies. Naturally, all spiritual practices in mainland China, including various expressions of religion, have been the targets and victims of persecutions by the CCP. The persecution against Falun Gong, in terms of its scale and scope, and the extent of egregious physical and psychological abuses imposed on practitioners, however, make this possibly the worst spiritual persecution we have seen in this day and age. Against this backdrop, practitioners in mainland China, in adherence to the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, began an exceptionally arduous peaceful resistance effort against the persecution. On top of which, they have remained faithful to the practice and diligent in studying the texts and doing the exercises of Falun Dafa, mostly in secrecy and away from the prying eyes of state agents, so as to avoid risking their freedom and sometimes even their lives.

One other scenario worth noting are people who became practitioners after the persecution had begun in 1999. For those in China, doing so meant exposing themselves to great personal risks. Despite the smear campaign launched by the CCP to misinform the public about Falun

Dafa, many individuals, both within and outside of China, have learned about the truth of this invaluable cultivation practice. Through their own rational judgment, these people have chosen to become practitioners because they have come to understand that the wisdom and overall well-being in both the spiritual and physical sense one receives from Falun Dafa cultivation are of inestimable worth.

It is also indicated that, the current technology and the persecution in China limit scientific research on Falun Dafa, means the whole picture of benefits that can be delivered by Falun Dafa cannot be shown so far due to the persecution, and this point was reflected during above mentioned 65th Annual International Council of Psychologists (ICP) Conference in 2007 [71]. Dr. Jason Liu said the result he presented during those days was only a small part of what the practice can achieve. The current technology and the persecution in China limit scientific research on much more topics in Falun Dafa. But his research received a warm welcome from conference participants. When the psychologists learned that Falun Dafa has been under the Chinese Communist regime's persecution for so many years (since 1999), they showed their support and sympathy for Falun Dafa. They hoped to introduce this profound practice to others and wished to personally learn more about Falun Dafa to assist with their research on psychology and medicine. Many psychologists agreed that future psychological research and validation should not be confined only to western medicine that focuses on and treats only the symptoms of illness. Psychology should seriously begin researching the theory of eastern traditional health care such as Falun Dafa, a universal view of body and mind practice, and energy medicine. From achievement of health and well-being perspective, we believe, with support from those scientists like above psychologists showing righteous thoughts to Falun Dafa, investigators like in the study team [75] in the 2016 ASCO Annual Meeting will present much more data, if without persecution, from scientific research on terminal cancer survivors practicing Falun Dafa and other beneficial cohorts with more larger sample size, for people in all over the world.

5. Conclusion

Results from NIH-funded studies on CAM mind-body therapies include a lot [84]. Reports on various mind-body therapies to help at least treat certain neurological diseases involving pain providing some evidence for positive effects from some therapies. A spiritual perspective in medical practice and research had been adopted by some mainstream medical journals around the year of 1999 [85–88]. The origin of Chinese music can be dated back to distant antiquity, with ancient Chinese instruments sharing a deep connection with Heaven and Earth. Music in Shen Yun Performing Arts features the perfect harmony of classical music of East and West, and leading the melody amidst a full Western orchestra, so that they together create a profound musical experience that resonates deep in the heart, delivering pure energy. To revive traditional culture has benefits including letting people keep in moral level in daily life, and there is an example from ancient China, that people respect the Heaven to possess the five cardinal virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness.

It has been reported that Falun Dafa exhibits very dramatic and powerful effects on practitioners [89], and Falun Dafa is a mind-and-body practice that incorporates meditation with spiritual improvement, known traditionally as cultivation. Guided by the supreme principle of Truthfulness-Benevolence-Forbearance to always cultivate their hearts and minds, Falun Dafa practitioners strive to have increasingly better behaviors in all environments and conditions, and always try best to give up various bad habits and attachments, like those of being anger, anxiety, jealousy and having desire for personal fame and gain, etc. Falun Dafa practitioners also conduct the five sets of exercises to achieve bodies purified and energy increased. Based on all of these, the spreading of Falun Dafa is helping to improve family harmony, perform co-operation at work and deliver safety in neighborhoods. Simultaneously, this has also encouraged care for the environment, stabilization in societies, and goodness in human's hearts. Falun Dafa teaches practitioners to live by basic principles of the self-practice system combined with meditation exercises, to become very good people in the society, having genuine well-being as well.

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