

# Shadows of Mawangdui

*Animating the Silk Daoyintu*

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# Acknowledgments

This book has taken a long time to evolve. It began in the late 1990s with our studies of Taijiquan and various energy practices with Master Li Changduo and Madam Hu Yang in Leuven, Belgium. In 2002, Madam Hu Yang told our class that we were going to learn some new exercises. These new exercises turned out to be the *Daoyintu*, which were depicted on a silk manuscript found at the Mawangdui tombs sealed more than 2000 years ago.

Madam Hu Yang never explained where she learned the movements, but she freely passed them on to us. Each student received a copy of the *Daoyintu* figures, which can be seen in Chapter One, figure 2. As she taught each movement, one of the authors kept detailed notes and stick-figure drawings in order to reconstruct the movements in case memory failed. Her interpretations of the forty-four *Daoyintu* figures are the basis for the movements presented in this book, augmented by twenty years of the authors experience practicing, teaching, and refining them.

By 2006 we had taken separate paths both as learners and teachers. Tony received an Acupuncture Degree from the University of Portsmouth, UK, and Ron, who had moved to Texas, studied various bodywork therapies and taught thousands of taiji quan classes. Being friends, we stayed in touch, but it really wasn't until 2016, when we met at Tony's house in Florida, and practiced all forty-four *Daoyintu* movements, that we fully realized there had been hidden treasure in Hu Yang's lessons. In May 2020, Tony suggested that the two of us collaborate on a book

Referring to the hand-written instruction book, we re-tried each movement on our own, attempting to reimagine the ancient wisdom that created them. We drew on lessons from past teachers and continued to learn with our students. With plenty of time on our hands and Skype sessions twice a week the book started to take form. This creative process, along with our academic research, gave us new insights into the possible meaning of the *Daoyintu* images, as well as about energy flow.

To augment our understanding of the *Daoyintu*, we referred to experts who have written well-researched books in English dealing with this subject. Among them are Donald Harper, whose book *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* is seminal. He initially studied reproductions of the original material in 1977 and later, in consultation with a group of Chinese researchers, he had access to the original material. As such he is a main source of Chinese translation and interpretation.

Other key academic sources are Livia Kohn's book *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin* and her edited volume, *Daoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*. A particularly insightful piece in the latter is "Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition" by Catherine Despeux. We have also appreciated the perspective of Vivienne Lo's translation of the *Yinshu*, a contemporaneous health manuscript. *Creativity and Daoism*, by Chung-yuan Chang, was also a very helpful source. Their knowledge of ancient Chinese culture, Daoism, and the Chinese language have helped us understand what may have been intended by the creator(s) of these movements.

We want to thank Madam Hu Yang, who taught us the *Daoyintu* and set us on the path to this book. Additionally, we are sincerely grateful to a number of teachers who's in-person and written instruction, over the years, helped us understand the physical and energetic aspects of the *Daoyintu*. They include Master Li Changduo, Master Kai-Han Lo, Madame Gei-Lin Liu, and Master Freddie Van Hove, from Brussels; Master Su Yu-chang in Taiwan; Master Simon Lau at Eastern Horizons Studio in London, Master Leng Tang in Florida, Master Lam Kam Chuen, Dr. Stephen T. Chang, Mimi Kuo-Deemer, and Wong Kiew Kit. Our dedicated students Jim Fesler, Diana Casabar, Kathy Tipps, Tom Gartside, Dr. Chikita Maus, and Hector Petroni helped us refine movements and validate their effects.

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# Introduction

The *Daoyintu* is one of the earliest documents on Chinese health and energy cultivation practice. As Yu Gongbao notes,

Its oldest and most diverse form is *daoyin*, which holds an important position in the traditional Chinese art of preserving one's health. *Dao* refers to the fact that physical movements are guided by the strength of the minds and in turn stimulate the internal flow of *qi* within the body. *Yin* means that with the aid of physical movements, *qi* can reach the bodily extremities (e.g., the fingers, feet, and head). (1995, 8)

The term *daoyin* consists of two characters, that each have ten meanings. To begin, *dao* 導 means “to guide.” It is different from the character for *dao* or “way” 道, the root of the word Daoism. To avoid confusion of English usages, we will use the term Daoism when referring to the philosophy and religion. Also, note that the Chinese character for *yin* 陰, as in *yin* and *yang* is different from the Chinese character for *yin* 引 in *daoyin*, which means “to pull” or “stretch.” *Tu* 圖, finally, means “map” and can be interpreted as chart.

After many years of learning, practicing and teaching, we have observed that no one practices exactly the same form of *daoyin*, *qigong*, or *taiji quan*. So, there are in a sense as many different forms of energy cultivation as the number of people who practice them. The way each person performs a *daoyin*, *qigong* or *taiji quan* form is a variation on the same theme of moving and guiding *qi* for greater energy, health and healing. We have avoided using the term *qigong*, because its meaning has become so diverse. Instead, we use the term *daoyin* for the energy practice and *Daoyintu* for the original drawings of the forty-four figures that form the basis of our book.

Because the *Daoyintu* manuscript was damaged, the postures, their names, and their purpose are only partially understood. The incomplete static figures are akin to shadows that may be interpreted in many ways.

## 2 / Introduction

We offer movements that tap into ancient wisdom which have both specific and general application to various health and energy conditions. When you have learned the physical movements, you can explore them in energetic depth. We provide some techniques to gain insight for a self-care plan. Then, if you wish, you can delve deeper into more esoteric practices of ritual and meditation. We have found these play important roles when doing *daoyin*.

Doing these movements can give you feelings of release and a profound sense of connection. Both authors have had spiritual experiences while practicing the animal movements of the *Daoyintu* and the *Wuqinxi* (Five Animals' Frolics), through the direct and indirect teachings of Master Simon Lau who teaches at the Eastern Horizon Studios in South Kensington, London.

Over time, everyone builds up a set of personal healing actions, that can range from simply rubbing a sore area to doing a complex stretch, energy form, acupressure, acupuncture, or dietary practice. We hope you will take the portions of this book that appeal to you and add them to your complementary health practice, making informed decisions and taking responsibility for your own self-care. You can, and should, go further to re-imagine and re-create new sets of movements and practices inspired by the *Daoyintu* into your own personal repertoire.

We do not feel that we should make any promises about results from doing the activities in this book. We have our own personal results, but your results may vary. We hope you enjoy doing them as much as we and our students do, but relax, and do not try too hard.

## **Boundless Possibilities**

Penetrating Yin and Yang,  
    Inside the Abdomen,  
Pulling the Warm Ailment,  
Looking Up and Shouting,  
    Crane Calling,  
    Monkey Bawling,  
    Gibbon Jumping,  
    Bear Rambling,  
    Dragon Ascending.  
The Uncarved Block Awaits.

# Chapter One

## An Enigma at Mawangdui

### An Ancient Library for Health

It's the time of the Han dynasty, which lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE, Chancellor Li Cang, also known as the Marquis of Dai and his wife, Xin Zhui, are preparing to bury their son in the family tomb at Mawangdui near Changsha in Hunan. In the beliefs of that time, the "soul" was split at death and part of it remained on earth, associated with the body of the deceased. This essence of their son, judged to be in his thirties, could still learn and develop skills for the afterlife. Thus, a considerable library was interred with him. As Livia Kohn notes,

In Han understanding – also in later Daoist views – the newly buried person was thus still thought to be present. At this stage, with the two souls just starting to separate, the *qi* would still be active in the body and it might be possible that in this new state, removed from the sensory involvements and passions of the world, the person could still undertake the refinement of *qi* and transformation necessary to enhance life and attain a heavenly state. (2008, 35)

The written documents placed in the tomb with their son, were treasures then and now. There were texts on astronomy, politics, the *Yi-jing* (Book of Changes), medicine, and exercise. Some texts were on bamboo, some on silk; all were carefully stacked in a lacquer case. For the time, it was a considerable compendium of important subjects for study and self-improvement. The tomb, interring the son and the self-improvement library, was closed. Some years later, the bodies of his father and mother were added and the tomb was permanently sealed in 168 BCE. It was not discovered until 1973.

When the collection of documents was found, there was quite a bit of excitement as they provided insight into a special period of cultural

and scientific transition. Magical recipes, exorcisms, charms, and incantations are included in many of the medical texts. Donald Harper says,

Significant spiritual and intellectual changes were clearly underway between the fourth and third centuries BCE. The changes produced a flowering of specialists in natural philosophy and occult knowledge in the third century BCE., as well as an explosion of *fang*-literature. I refer to the literature itself as '*fang literature*,' based on the significance of the concept of *fang* 方 (recipe) in defining natural philosophy and occult thought. (2009, 8)

The Mawangdui medical texts belong to the third century BCE explosion. (2009, 39)

Some documents were well preserved and attention-getting, for example, a T-shaped silk painting on display in the Changsha Mawangdui Han Dynasty tombs exhibition. Other items were in poor condition, fragmented and enigmatic. One of these was a silk drawing (below), called the *Daoyintu* (Diagram of Guiding and Pulling). *Daoyin* is an ancient form of fitness and health activity. The Chinese word *tu* can be variously: map, chart, or diagram. We will use the term *Daoyintu* to refer to the painting on silk of the forty-four movements and *daoyin* as the generic word designating the energy and health cultivation practice.

Another trove of medical manuscripts, unearthed from a tomb at Jiangling, Zhangjianshan, included a text entitled *Yinshu* (The Pulling Book), which consisted of roughly 113 bamboo strips. Livia Kohn provides a detailed description of these exercises (2008, 41-61), while Vivienne Lo has published a full translation (2014). The *Yinshu* is considered "the earliest extant treatise on the Chinese tradition of *daoyin* (guiding and pulling), dating to the second century BCE" (Lo 2014, i). Text only, without pictures, it provides forty-one health exercises, but with scant relation to the *Daoyintu*. It is unfortunate that more instructions did not survive with the *Daoyintu* (see also App. 1).

The verbs "guiding" and "pulling" refer to guiding vital energy (*qi*) to desired locations and pulling out that which is painful, stale, toxic, or unwanted. (Harper 2009, 25). Part of the body of medical theory of the

time was that spirits or demons caused illness. Theories of energy and blood flow were also becoming dominant at that then.

By the third century BCE., ideas concerning the *mai* 脈 (vessels) filled with blood and *qi* 氣 (vapor) inside the body dominated physiological speculation; one definition of health was the maintenance of a constant supply of free-flowing blood and vapor in the vessels. (2009, 69)



Fig 1. Original Mawangdui silk drawing.

As can be seen from the original silk drawing above, there was considerable damage. Thirteen of the figures and many of their names and functions were incomplete or missing. Over time, scholars and researchers pieced together information which was used to reconstruct images of the people practicing guiding and pulling or stretching. Figure 2 presents a reconstructed image of the original chart, that has appeared in many publications on this subject.



Fig. 2 Reconstructed image of the *Daoyintu*.

Although not included in the reconstruction, there are two sections of text to the right of the *daoyintu*.



Fig. 3 Medical texts attached to the *Daoyintu*.

The text on the far right, referred to by Harper as MSII.A, is the *Quegu shiqi*, Eliminating Grain and Eating Vapor (or Abstaining from Grain and Ingesting Qi), that deals with breathing exercises. The text nearest to the images, referred to by Harper as MSI.B., is the *Yinyang*

*shiyi mai jiujiing yiben*, or Cauterization Canon of the Eleven Yin and Yang Vessels. (2009. 305-6). There could be connections between the two texts and the images, which doubtless warrant further research and discussion. Some aspects of breathing will be addressed in Chapter Three.

## Analyzing the *Daoyintu*

The original *Daoyintu* silk drawing is incomplete, as are the instructions, and the figures are snapshots of movement, so the exact nature of the forty-four activities is open to interpretation. Since they were discovered in 1973, there have been a number of interpretive efforts to recreate the movements individually and as forms (combinations of movement). Some authors do not think the movements are in any discernable logical order. From inspection of the figures, and their surviving names, one can make the following observations:

Both men and women are doing the movements. They wear various types of clothing, possibly indicating that different classes of people did these movements.

Eight of the figures are bare chested. This could indicate the figures represent soldiers or laborers. Another interpretation is that figures shown without shirts indicate breathing patterns. That is, the creator of the chart used a protruding belly to indicate abdominal breathing and an indrawn belly to indicate reverse abdominal breathing.

At least four of the images indicate or imply making sounds. Others show tools or utensils. In two cases, poles are used. One object appears to be an apple. Several other objects have been variously interpreted as a bowl, disc, or bag.

Another key feature is that animal names are used at least nine times. The use of animals gives useful clues as to what kind of movement is likely intended, without accompanying instructions, although there is opportunity for interpretation. Vivienne Lo says,

Consider, for example, the appeal to the imagination of animals in the context of *Daoyintu*, *Yinshu* and more generally throughout the culture of



*daoyin*. Where a particular posture is given the name of an animal, there are immediate, commonly understood implications for the interpretation of that image with the body. But we cannot assume that we have grasped the full implications of the designation without questioning whether our understanding of a bear, monkey, crane or dragon is stunted by removal and distance. (Lo 2007, 84)

Animal movements indicate there was a shamanistic element to these healing activities and that a single movement or a number of movements could have been combined in a dance or *Daoyintu* form. As Catherine Despeux writes,

In antiquity, *daoyin* movements evoked fluidity and were sometimes even used as dance. Judging by documents found at Mawangdui, Zhangjiashan [the *Yinshu*], and later, the practice of *daoyin* consisted mainly of isolated movements, but on occasion also formed a series of sequential movements constituting a real dance. One such series is described in the Zhangjiashan manuscript, *Yinshu*. However, dance in general was already present in the culture as a basic technique used by shamans, as described in the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou). (Despeux 2004, 61)

## ***Daoyintu* Images in Other Documents**

It is evident from a cursory review that *Daoyintu* images appeared in medical and exercise literature over the centuries. Routines for specific ailments and general exercise routines can be found in the *Yinshu* (Pulling Book), found in a manuscript dated to 186 BCE, a few years earlier than the *Daoyintu*). In addition, the *Wuqinxi* (Five Animals' Frolics) of the physician Hua Tuo (2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE) could easily have drawn from the *Daoyintu* as four of the five animals (bear, tiger, monkey, and crane) appear in both. *Daoyintu*-like images appear in a Tang-dynasty book called *Qianjin yaofang* (Essential Prescriptions for Emergencies Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold), in the Eight Pieces of Brocade as documented in the Southern Song dynasty, and in the so-called Forty-Nine Prescriptions of the Ming (see App. 1).

Over a third of the *Daoyintu* movements (i.e., #3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 15, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 32, 39, 40, 42) appear also in other exercise routines, indicating that the chart has had a pervasive and lasting influence on Chinese health and energy practices over the centuries.

## Naming Conventions

A number of the names and description of movements that did survive indicate that some were prescriptive for specific conditions, such as knee and ham (gluteus) pain. As stated above, many of the movements evoke the actions of animals and have names like “Bear Ramble” and “Crane Call.” Where a name was decipherable from the manuscript, as interpreted by Donald Harper, it has been used with the associated figure. In some cases, the translations of Livia Kohn are used. Our teacher Hu Yang provided names for some of the other figures and we have used these. Where names were not given (or perhaps forgotten), the authors have provided ones they hope are descriptive and appropriate.

## A Numbering System for the *Daoyintu* Movements

As the Chinese language is read in columns starting from right to left, one assumes the silk tapestry was meant to be read in the same way. Therefore, the figure in the top right corner of the silk tapestry is number 1. Having been taught the movements row by row starting at the top right-hand corner, we have therefore numbered the movements using the same convention. Thus, the figure just below #1 is #12 and the last figure in the lower left corner is #44. Both Donald Harper and Livia Kohn use this numbering convention, although Vivienne Lo uses a different convention.

After doing them for many years, our general feeling is that while some of these movements may seem quite simple and less refined than many modern energy exercises, they are very potent. When performed with a certain mind-set, one may have profound experiences. The animal movements are particularly powerful, as one emulates the animal, identifies with it, and forms a spiritual connection.

