

The history, research, and application of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) guidance techniques in the clinical management of chronic

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Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Abbreviations

TCM, traditional Chinese medicine; DM, diabetes mellitus; ADA, American Diabetes Association; FPG, fasting plasma glucose; COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; AECOPD, acute exacerbations of COPD.

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese guidance techniques are an important part of traditional Chinese medicine and involve integrating three aspects: essence, energy, and spirit, while combining physical movement, breath control, and mental regulation. Traditional Chinese guidance techniques include Tai Chi, Eight Section Brocade, Five Animal Frolics, Yi Jin Jing, and Liu Zi Jue, among others. In recent years, an increasing number of clinical studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of guidance techniques on promoting health and well-being safely. This study provides a systematic and comprehensive summary and analysis of the research on the application of Traditional Chinese guidance techniques in the management of chronic diseases, offering valuable insights for future clinical research directions and the integration of these techniques into medical practice.

Keywords: Daoyin Therapy; energy and spirit; chronic diseases

Introduction

The health of the people is a crucial indicator of the prosperity of a nation and the strength of a country. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China outlined a new blueprint for “Healthy China” and emphasized the strategic priority of ensuring the health of the people in advancing the construction of a Healthy China. In order to implement the “Healthy China Action (2019–2030)” and the “National Nutrition Plan (2017–2030)” [1], promote traditional dietary health services, and prevent and control the development of chronic diseases in the Chinese population, the National Health Commission has compiled the *Dietary Guidelines for Adults with Hyperlipidemia* (2023 Edition), *Dietary Guidelines for Adults with Hypertension* (2023 Edition), *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents with Growth Delay* (2023 Edition), and *Dietary Guidelines for Adults with Diabetes* (2023 Edition).

The Dictionary of Demography, compiled by the International Population Institute, defines the demographic structure of a population in which 7 percent of the population is over 65 years of age or 10 percent of the population is over 60 years of age as an “ageing society”, and one in which more than 14 percent of the population is over 65 years of age or 20 percent of the population is over 60 years of age as an “ageing society”. In 2022, there will be more than 280 million people aged 60 and above, accounting for 19.8% of the total population; and 210 million people aged 65 and above, accounting for 14.9% of the total population. *The World Population Prospects 2022* issued by the United Nations predicts that by 2050, China will enter a heavily ageing society, with more than 500 million elderly people aged 60 and above. As the degree of aging deepens, how to give the elderly a sense of security, a sense of joy and a sense of peace in their old age is an important issue facing our country and a topic of common concern for the whole society.

The mortality and disability rates due to chronic diseases among the elderly have been increasing year by year, posing a formidable challenge to achieving healthy aging in our country. Traditional Chinese medicine has made outstanding contributions to our health and the treatment of many diseases. It is evident that the country places great importance on the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases among the population.

Traditional Chinese guidance techniques, as an important component of traditional Chinese medicine, have played a significant role in healthcare in China since ancient times. They have a significant preventive and therapeutic effect on chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The historical evidence of guiding techniques

The earliest archaeological discovery of guiding techniques in China dates back to the end of 1973, when a silk painting titled “Guiding Diagram” was unearthed from the Han tomb numbered three in Ma Wang Dui, Changsha [2]. According to historical records found in the *Zhuangzi Ke Yi* [3], it is mentioned: “Boasting about one’s breath, expelling the old and taking in the new, following the paths of the Bear and Bird, all for the sake of longevity. These guiding individuals were favored by those who sought to nourish their vitality”. The earliest written record of guiding as a therapeutic method can be found in the “*Huangdi Neijing-Yifang Yizhi Lun*” [4], which states: “In the central region where the land is level and moist, the place where Heaven and Earth give rise to myriad beings, the people have a diverse diet and little toil. Consequently, their illnesses often manifest as withering and cold or heat. For their treatment, guiding techniques involving pressing and tapping are suitable, as these also originate from the central region.” The *Lüshi Chunqiu-Gule Pian* from the Qin Dynasty [5] mentions: “In ancient times, during the beginning of the Taotang era, there was an excess of stagnation in the Yin energy,

leading to blockages in the waterways and a failure to follow their natural courses. The people’s vital energy became stagnant, their muscles and bones contracted, and they were unable to move freely. Therefore, a dance was created to facilitate guidance.” This dance attributed to Taotang can be considered one of the earliest forms of guiding, aiming to harmonize the flow of qi and blood and promote the circulation of the muscles and bones (Figure 1).

These historical accounts and archaeological findings shed light on the ancient origins of guiding techniques in China. They reveal a practice that sought to enhance health and longevity through various methods, including breath control, movement, and therapeutic techniques.

Spring and Autumn Period to Warring States period: The embryonic stage

During the Warring States Period, Zhuangzi’s “*Zhuangzi Ke Yi*” contains the following passage: “Blowing and exhaling, expelling the old and taking in the new, walking like a bear and stretching like a bird, all for the sake of longevity. These are the practices of guiding individuals, nurturing their health, and pursuing the longevity achieved by figures like Pengzu, who lived for over 800 years from the summer to the end of the Yin dynasty.” This indicates that during the Spring and Autumn Period to the Warring States Period, people were already practicing breath control, imitating the walking of bears, and mimicking bird-like postures for the purpose of health preservation, aiming to attain the remarkable longevity, as exemplified by Pengzu, who supposedly lived for over 800 years from the summer to the end of the Yin Dynasty.

The period of the Two Han Dynasties: initial development stage

In the “*Huangdi Neijing Ling Shu-Bing Chuan*”, there is a dialogue where Huangdi asks Qibo: “I received nine methods from my teacher and have privately studied various approaches, some involving guiding, circulating qi, qiao, mo, acupuncture, fumigation, needling, and medicinal decoctions. Should I exclusively adhere to one of these methods, or should I use them all?” This implies that in clinical practice during the Two Han Dynasties, it was understood that not all therapeutic methods should be universally applied to every illness. Instead, treatment should be based on differentiating and diagnosing patients’ unique conditions, selecting the most appropriate therapeutic approach. This indicates that at this time, guiding was already being widely utilized as a therapeutic method in clinical practice.

In December 1983 to January 1984, a specialized work on guiding and health preservation titled “The Book of Guiding” was unearthed from the Han tomb in Zhangjiashan, Jiangling, Hubei Province (Figure 2). This work dates back to 186 BCE and consists of 112 bamboo slips, with a total of 3,235 characters. It is currently the earliest known specialized treatise on guiding.

The Book of Guiding can be divided into three parts: (1) The first part discusses the principles of health preservation throughout the four seasons, detailing how to maintain health according to different seasons. (2) The second part records various postures and methods of guiding therapy and how to use guiding techniques to treat various diseases. (3) The third part elucidates the factors causing diseases, corresponding preventive measures through guiding, and rules for health preservation.

The entire book contains 110 forms of guiding techniques, with 101 distinct ones when duplicates are excluded. Among these, 85 describe specific techniques, 50 are used for treating diseases, and only 16 describe their functions. This document provides valuable insights into ancient guiding techniques and health preservation, revealing how ancient people used guiding for maintaining health and treating illnesses.



Figure 1 The silk painting *Dao Yin Tu* (Guiding Diagram) unearthed from the Ma Wang Dui Tomb No. 3 in Han Dynasty



Figure 2 Partial diagram of the *Yin Shu* in Zhangjiashan

Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties: emergence stage

During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the Daoist philosopher, renowned alchemist, and medical scholar Ge Hong wrote “*Baopuzi-Nei Pian*”, [6] in which he documented many aspects of guiding techniques. For example, he wrote, “The way of guiding emphasizes harmony, with gentle inclining and reclining, bending and stretching with rhythm.” He considered these principles as fundamental to guiding. Ge Hong stated, “The secret teachings of guiding number over a thousand, used to reverse and cure various diseases of both the young and old or to treat deeply rooted ailments. When practiced effectively, it is not mere empty talk.” This indicates Ge Hong’s affirmation of the efficacy of guiding techniques. He believed that “Guiding is for preventing illnesses that have not yet arisen, regulating disharmonious qi, and truly adhering to the great law of nurturing life and the profound art of dispelling illnesses”. In *Baopuzi-Bie Zhi*, it is mentioned, “Guiding does not rely on names, imitating objects, powdering and drawing, representing forms, or creating diagrams; it has no fixed form. Whether bending or stretching, inclining or reclining, walking or lying down, leaning or standing, hesitating or advancing, chanting or resting, all of these are forms of guiding.” Ge Hong believed that guiding techniques were not about external movements and postures but rather about understanding the underlying principles, and any action could be a form of guiding when those principles were applied.

Sui and Tang Dynasties: popularization stage

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, there was a surge in the popularity

of guiding techniques.

The first existing specialized book on etiology and pathogenesis in China, known as the “*Zhubing Yuanhoulun*” [7] (Treatise on the Origin and Symptoms of Various Diseases), was compiled under the supervision of Chao Yuanfang, the Director of the Imperial Medical Bureau. This work was completed in the year 610 CE. It primarily focused on the causes and mechanisms of diseases, with minimal discussion of herbal remedies. At the end of each section, there was a sentence stating: “As for the herbal decoctions, fumigations, acupuncture, and stones, specific methods exist.” However, throughout the entire book, it contained a total of 289 entries related to “nurturing life and guiding techniques” or simply “nurturing life methods”. After eliminating duplicates, there were 213 distinct guiding techniques. These techniques covered various medical fields, including internal medicine, external medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, and ophthalmology. The sheer number of guiding techniques and the breadth of diseases they covered were unprecedented. This book can be considered a comprehensive collection of guiding techniques before the Sui Dynasty.

In the Tang Dynasty, the renowned medical scholar and “Medicine King” Sun Simiao documented various massage techniques in his work *Qianjin Yaofang* [8] (Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold), specifically in the section on “Nurturing One’s Nature-Massage Techniques”. This section included descriptions of massage techniques from different regions, such as the “Indian Massage Techniques” and “Laozi’s Massage Techniques”, which included 18 and as many as 35

different techniques, respectively.

The Period of the Two Song Dynasties: prosperous stage

During the Northern Song Dynasty, the renowned literary figure Su Shi (Su Dongpo) placed special emphasis on guiding techniques. In his work *Yangsheng Ji* (Verses on Nurturing Life), he documented, “Suppress the evil and nurture sincerity, cultivate Qi and nourish essence.” Su Shi practiced guiding techniques every night during the time between the third night watch (around 11 PM) and the fifth night watch (around 3 AM). He described the process: “Wrap oneself in a robe and sit on the bed, or sit while covered with blankets; facing east or south, cross the legs, and knock the teeth together thirty-six times. Hold firmly with two fingers, either the third or fourth finger grasping the thumb, with both hands placed between the waist and the abdomen. Close the breath; this closure of breath is crucial in Daoist practice. Initially, close the breath, dispel worries, and eliminate distracting thoughts, allowing the mind to become clear and tranquil. No thoughts should arise. Then, naturally regulate the inhalation and exhalation, eventually closing the mouth and nose as well. Internally observe the five organs: lungs, white; liver, green; spleen, yellow; heart, red; kidneys, black. Constantly seek an image of the five organs to hang on the wall, making oneself familiar with the shapes of the internal organs. Next, visualize the heart as a flame, brilliantly illuminating, descending into the elixir field (lower abdomen), waiting until the abdomen is full of Qi to the point of utmost fullness, then slowly exhale the breath. This exhalation should not produce any sound. Ensure that both inhalation and exhalation are evenly regulated. Close the mouth and nose, inside and outside rinsing the essence. If there is nasal mucus, it should be rinsed as well, so that it is not felt as salty. With continuous practice, it will naturally become sweet and pleasant. This is true Qi, and it should not be neglected. Without swallowing it yet, repeat the previous method: close the breath, internally observe, hold Qi, rinse moisture, all following the previous method. After three repetitions, when moisture fills the mouth, lower the head and swallow it. During this process, use your intention vigorously so that the moisture and Qi are gulped down with sound, directly entering the elixir field. Repeat this process nine times, and then stop”. Su Shi also emphasized, “You should practice closing the breath regularly, gradually increasing the duration. Observing your pulse, one cycle consists of five breaths. Lately, I have been able to close the breath for a long time, closing it around 120 times before opening. This means that I have been able to close it for more than 20 cycles. However, do not forcefully close the breath for extended periods, as it may disrupt the Qi and lead to sudden outbursts, which would be detrimental. Be cautious.”

In the late Northern Song Dynasty, Emperor Huizong of Song, Zhao Ji, ordered the compilation of the *Shengji Zonglu* [9] (Complete Record of Holy Relief). This work included two volumes dedicated to “Divine Guidance” and “Divine Nourishment”. It introduced the idea that “cultivators of Daoism should prioritize guiding techniques” and provided descriptions of various guiding techniques such as “Tai Shang Hunyin Massage Method”, “Indian Massage Method”, and “Six-Character Formula”.

During the Song Dynasty, a musical genre called “Dao Yin Qu” [10] (Guiding Tunes) emerged. It included compositions like “Qi and Light Harmony”, which became an essential part of national ceremonial events.

In the Southern Song Dynasty, the poet and statesman Lu You also emphasized the importance of guiding techniques for cultivating and preserving one’s vital energy. He wrote, “In the pursuit of Dao, one should first nurture Qi; I have heard this from the *Three Abodes* chapter. Discard the golden cauldron and medicines, and instead use millet husks and a jade box. Tread carefully like walking on spring ice and guard your essence like precious jade. Speak highly but do not overexert yourself. This illness is the most critical.”

Throughout history, guiding techniques have been practiced alongside herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage, and moxibustion as essential methods for health preservation and disease treatment. They have played a significant role in promoting the well-being of the

people.

The Ming and Qing Dynasties: culmination stage

During the Ming Dynasty, Gao Lian authored a comprehensive health preservation treatise called “*Zunsheng Bajian*” [11] (Eight Discourses on Nurturing Life). This work offered various methods for self-cultivation and health preservation, including dietary habits, daily routines, and mental regulation, all aimed at preventing diseases and extending one’s lifespan. *Zunsheng Bajian* contained numerous descriptions of guiding and massage techniques. These included methods like the “Nourishing the Five Organs and the Five Elements Qi Technique”, “Chen Xiyi’s Four Seasons Guiding Sitting Postures”, “Fetal Breathing Inscription Explanation”, “Master Huanzhen’s Inner Yuan Qi Formula”, “Left Cave True Classic Massage and Guiding Formula”, “Chen Xiyi’s Left and Right Sleeping Postures”, and the “Tai Shang Hunyin Massage Method”, among others.

The physician Luo Hongxian, in his work *Wanshou Xianshu* [12] (The Book of Ten Thousand Longevity), proposed, “Guide and prevent diseases before they arise; massage and expel diseases when they have already manifested”. He believed that guiding techniques could be used for disease prevention.

In the Qing Dynasty, Wang Zuyuan’s *Neigong Tushuo* [13] (Illustrated Explanation of Internal Work), published in the 7th year of Emperor Guangxu’s reign, included various sections such as the “Twelve Jin Exercises”, “Separate External Work Formulas”, “Internal Work Diagrams”, and “Disease Causes of the Five Organs”. One of the practices mentioned, the “Methods of the Immortals’ Daily Life”, originated from Yang Ning-style teachings passed down from the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. The “*Twelve Postures of the Yi Jin Jing*” can be traced back to the Kangxi era compilation of the “*Yi Jin Jing*” [14]. These works represent comprehensive collections of guiding techniques and practices from before the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Traditional guiding practices

Tai Chi Chuan

Tai Chi Chuan is one of Chinese traditional health recovery exercises, with the most famous being the Chen-style Tai Chi Chuan from Chenjiagou in Wen County, Henan Province [15, 16]. It has been practiced since ancient times and combines the principles of diet, Tai Chi, martial arts, guiding techniques, and breath control into one comprehensive fitness exercise. It is often referred to as Tai Chi, and it represents a broad philosophical and theoretical concept in Chinese culture. It describes the dynamic balance in the natural world (the universe) between opposing and interdependent phenomena, with the core concept being the balance between yin and yang. As the Song Dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi said, “Tai Chi moves to give birth and nurture; it is not that movement produces yang, for movement already belongs to yang, and stillness belongs to yin”. Tai Chi Chuan is built upon these principles, emphasizing the combination of movement and stillness, external softness and internal strength, and the harmonization of both inner and outer aspects [17].

In the early 1960s, Chairman Mao Zedong called for the practice of Tai Chi Chuan as part of a broader effort to “develop physical exercises, play ball games, run, swim, and practice Tai Chi Chuan” to “improve the physical fitness of the people”. This highlighted the crucial role of Tai Chi Chuan in enhancing the health of the population. Deng Xiaoping also endorsed Tai Chi Chuan in 1978 with the phrase “Tai Chi Chuan is good”, fully recognizing its unique charm and significant value.

Eight Section Brocade

The Eight Section Brocade, also known as Ba Duan Jin, originated during the Song Dynasty. It is a traditional Chinese qigong exercise and one of the most widely practiced methods for health preservation in traditional Chinese culture. It is divided into standing and seated forms. The name “Eight Section Brocade” first appeared in the book “*Yijian Zhi*” [18] by Hong Mai during the Southern Song Dynasty: “In

the seventh year of the Zhenghe era, Li Siju used to get up in the middle of the night, sit, exhale, inhale, and massage. He practiced what is called the 'Eight Section Brocade'."

Chen Yuanliang [19], at the end of the Song Dynasty and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, recorded the complete set of Eight Section Brocade qigong exercises, which includes eight movements. Each movement may consist of 4 to 8 repetitions. The Eight Section Brocade qigong exercises include postures called "holding the heavens with both hands to regulate the triple burner", "drawing the bow left and right like shooting a hawk", "raising and lowering the hands to regulate the spleen and stomach", "looking backward to prevent five strains and seven impairments", "swinging the head and shaking the tail to eliminate heart fire", "clasping the hands behind the back to regulate the kidneys and waist", "holding one arm aloft to regulate the functions of the five viscera", and "raising and lowering the heels to treat illnesses and strengthen the body" [20]. The Eight Section Brocade qigong exercises can help open the meridians, regulate the functions of the internal organs, and contribute to disease prevention and health preservation.

Five Animal Frolics

The Five Animal Frolics, also known as Wu Qin Xi, originated from the Eastern Han Dynasty and are a traditional Chinese qigong exercise. They were created by the great physician Hua Tuo, who based the movements on observations of animal behaviors. The exercises are designed to promote health and longevity by imitating the movements and behaviors of five animals: the tiger, deer, bear, monkey, and crane.

The earliest mention of the Five Animal Frolics can be found in the *San Guo Zhi* [21] (records of the Three Kingdoms) by Chen Shou during the Western Jin Dynasty, which mentions Hua Tuo practicing exercises imitating the five animals.

The Five Animal Frolics consist of ten movements, each corresponding to one of the five animals. These movements are named Tiger Pounces, Deer Bows, Bear Sways, Monkey Jumps, and Crane Flaps. Practicing the Five Animal Frolics is believed to balance the body's internal energy, promote flexibility, and improve overall health. Each movement is associated with specific meridians, organs, and elements according to traditional Chinese medicine theory.

The Five Animal Frolics have been recognized as a valuable part of Chinese cultural heritage and have been included in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. These exercises are still widely practiced in modern times as a means of improving physical and mental well-being [22, 23].

Research and application of the Three-Guidance Method in chronic diseases

Chronic diseases pose an urgent public health issue in China, particularly among the elderly population, due to their high prevalence, mortality rates, low control rates, and limited awareness, resulting in a significant economic burden on patients, their families, and society as a whole [24]. Currently, China has over 300 million diagnosed chronic disease patients, and the prevention and management of chronic diseases typically focus on behavioral interventions such as adopting a healthy diet, increasing physical activity, and quitting unhealthy habits like smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Traditional Chinese Guided Exercises, known as the Three-Guidance Method, represent a set of daily practices for managing chronic diseases and promoting recovery [25]. Effective self-management by elderly chronic disease patients can improve disease prognosis, enhance quality of life, and optimize the allocation of medical resources.

Research on the Three-Guidance Method in the treatment of hypertension

Hypertension (HP) is characterized by persistently elevated arterial blood pressure (systolic blood pressure ≥ 140 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure ≥ 90 mmHg) and can lead to functional or organic

damage in organs such as the heart, brain, and kidneys. It is currently the most common chronic disease among populations and a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, making it the highest cause of mortality worldwide. The updated key points of the *Chinese Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Hypertension* (2023 Edition) were announced during the 2022 China Hypertension Annual Conference and the 24th International Symposium on Hypertension and Related Diseases. A meta-analysis on the use of Tai Chi in treating hypertension found that it reduced systolic and diastolic blood pressure. In this study, 99 hypertensive patients were randomly divided into a control group and a Tai Chi group. The Tai Chi intervention lasted for 12 weeks, while the control group maintained normal dietary and exercise habits. The study revealed that, compared to the control group, the Tai Chi group showed a greater reduction in systolic and diastolic blood pressure after 12 weeks ($P < 0.001$). Serum concentrations of angiotensin II (Ang II) and nitric oxide (NO) were also measured, showing that, compared to the control group, the Tai Chi group had decreased Ang II levels and increased NO levels after 12 weeks ($P < 0.001$) [26, 27].

Huai'an Hospital Affiliated to Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine randomly assigned primary hypertensive patients to a control group and an observation group [28]. The control group received routine care, while the treatment group practiced the Five Animal Frolics. The results showed that patients in the treatment group had significantly lower diastolic and systolic blood pressure than those in the control group ($P < 0.05$), demonstrating a significant improvement in blood pressure control and an increase in their quality of life. A systematic review of the clinical randomized controlled trials of traditional Chinese health-preserving exercises, including Tai Chi, Five Animal Frolics, Six Healing Sounds, Yijinjing, and Ba Duan Jin, in the auxiliary treatment of hypertension showed that compared to modern medical lifestyle interventions, traditional Chinese health-preserving methods had significant clinical efficacy in reducing systolic and diastolic blood pressure, nitric oxide levels, and hydrogen sulfide levels [29].

Research on the Three-Guidance Method in the treatment of diabetes

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a group of metabolic disorders characterized by persistently elevated blood glucose levels. Clinical manifestations include increased urination, increased thirst, increased appetite, and weight loss. In traditional Chinese medicine, diabetes falls under the category of "Xiaoke", and it was first mentioned in the ancient Chinese medical text *Su Wen-Qi Bing Lun*, which states, "This person must frequently consume sweet and rich foods, which make the inner heat and fullness. Thus, their energy overflows and turns into thirst". According to Ming Dynasty physician Wang Kentang's *Zheng Zhi Zhun Shen-Xiao Han*, three types of "Xiaoke" were clinically classified: upper consumption (related to the diaphragm), middle consumption (related to digestion), and lower consumption (related to the kidneys). Traditional Chinese medicine attributes the development of diabetes to factors such as inadequate innate endowment, dietary imbalances, emotional disturbances, and improper work-rest ratios, primarily affecting kidney function. Diabetes can lead to various complications, including cardiovascular diseases, strokes, chronic kidney disease, foot ulcers, retinopathy, diabetic ketoacidosis, hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state, or even death [30]. The *Chinese Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes* explicitly recommend Tai Chi as one of the exercises for preventing and treating diabetes. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) also reports that physical activity is beneficial for type 2 diabetes patients. Tai Chi has been practiced in China for nearly 600 years and combines muscle and bone training, breathing exercises, and meditation [31]. Tai Chi emphasizes "uniting the mind with intention, intention regulating the breath, breath leading the form, and form merging with the spirit." The *Tai Chi Diagram Explanation* elaborates on the essence of Tai Chi, stating, "Tai Chi generates yang when in motion, reaches the utmost tranquility when still, and transforms into yin. When absolute stillness is reached, it reverts to motion, with one motion and one stillness

mutually giving rise to each other, separating yin from yang, and creating the two principles.” Research has shown that regular Tai Chi practice over several months can significantly reduce fasting plasma glucose (FPG) and glycated hemoglobin (HbA1C) levels. Systematic reviews indicate that Tai Chi training can regulate blood pressure, triglycerides, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, serum malondialdehyde, and C-reactive protein in diabetic patients [32].

In a randomized controlled trial conducted abroad, 54 type 2 diabetes patients were randomly divided into an intervention group and a control group [33]. The intervention group underwent two months of Ba Duan Jin practice, followed by a comparison between the two groups. The intervention group continued Ba Duan Jin practice for an additional two months, and after four months, there was a statistically significant difference in HbA1c levels in the intervention group ($P < 0.05$).

Research on the Three-Guidance Method in the treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is characterized by partially reversible airflow limitation, and patients often experience breathlessness. The *Classical Prescriptions for Treatment* states, “The lungs are the master of qi, and the kidneys are the root of qi. The lungs govern exhalation, the kidneys govern inhalation, and when yin and yang interact, there is harmonious breathing.” It has been reported that acute exacerbations of COPD (AECOPD) are associated with accelerated decline in lung function, reduced exercise capacity, impaired quality of life, and increased overall mortality. Tai Chi emphasizes incorporating diaphragmatic breathing into its slow, circular, and rhythmic controlled breathing, including pursed-lip breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, or active exhalation, and has been used in managing COPD [34]. Six systematic reviews on the use of Tai Chi in treating asthma and COPD found improvements in the results of the 6-minute walk test, reduced breathlessness, and improved forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV1) [35].

Modern research has shown that Ba Duan Jin’s regulation of qi and body is well-suited for pulmonary rehabilitation, involving respiratory exercises, psychological adjustments, and more. A clinical assessment trial evaluated the effect of seated Ba Duan Jin exercises on the pulmonary rehabilitation of patients with severe COPD. The results showed that seated Ba Duan Jin exercises helped improve respiratory muscle function, ventilation function, and relief of breathlessness in patients with COPD rated as severe or worse. It significantly improved FEV1 and FEV1/FVC [36]. Therefore, practicing Ba Duan Jin can actively improve the cardiopulmonary function of elderly individuals, benefiting the respiratory and circulatory systems. Ba Duan Jin focuses on regulating breathing during exercise, relaxing the body, massaging internal organs, and improving lung function, thereby slowing the progression of pulmonary impairment.

Conclusion

Wang Haidong, Director of the Department of Aging of the National Health and Health Commission, introduced that Chinese aging is characterized by a large number of people, rapid speed, large differences and heavy tasks. According to estimates, it is expected that during the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan period, the total number of elderly people aged 60 years and above will exceed 300 million, accounting for more than 20 per cent of the total population, and will enter the stage of moderate ageing; around 2035, the number of elderly people aged 60 years and above will exceed 400 million, accounting for more than 30 per cent of the total population, and will enter the stage of severe ageing.

The increasing size of the elderly population and the continued acceleration of its ageing. This will inevitably have a far-reaching impact on the economy, society, the family and other aspects of life, with chronic diseases replacing acute and infectious diseases as the main threats to health, and with a shift in the medical model towards a focus on long-term health care and disease prevention.

Chronic diseases have a significantly high prevalence in China and

continue to rise. Therefore, prevention of chronic diseases is becoming increasingly important. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has gained recognition for its advantages in prevention and healthcare compared to Western medicine. More than 50% of surveyed individuals believe that the greatest advantage of TCM lies in preventing and controlling complications, having fewer side effects, and delivering satisfactory healing outcomes. The Three-Guidance Method, rooted in the philosophy of the Yi Jing and TCM theories, represents a critical component of TCM and has been practiced for centuries, combining physical exercises, breath control, and meditation. It has gained popularity among people worldwide and has shown substantial benefits. Numerous randomized clinical trials have yielded positive results for the clinical efficacy of the Three-Guidance Method in managing various chronic diseases and health-related symptoms, including hypertension, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic lower back pain, Parkinson’s disease, and more. However, reports on research types, subjects, interventions, and outcomes vary widely and are inconsistent. Therefore, further methodologically rigorous studies with sufficient sample sizes are urgently needed to further validate the effectiveness of the Three-Guidance Method in health management.

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