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Baguazhang for Long Life

By Liang Keming

IT is common for elderly people to have a strong body odor and bad breath. This is often called "old person smell." Where does this come from? According to Chinese traditional medicine doctors and qigong masters, this phenomenon unique to the elderly has many causes. The aging of the cells of the body, coupled with an unbalanced diet and lack of exercise, results in meridian blockage, blood loss and mild inflammation in the internal organs. While this inflammation of the human body does not cause immediate harm, it can lead to endocrine disorders, internal organ imbalance, and indigestion. The increase of acidity in the body can exude unpleasant breath. This is because of yin and yang disorders and reduced abdominal pressure. In addition to paying more attention to diet, maintaining a pleasant attitude and taking the necessary Chinese herb supplements, the solution is regular exercise. Exercise should combine stillness and meditation with movement. No matter what, the purpose of the movements is to unblock the meridians and stimulate qi and blood circulation. This helps to expel disease and prolong life. *Baguazhang* (eight trigram palm 八卦掌) follows the Daoist tradition to harmonize the yin and yang balance of the body. There is a saying: "Yin is not *Dao*. Yang is not *Dao*. Between yin and yang is the *Dao* (道). This is also reflected in Buddhism and Confucianism. The Buddhists say, "All forms are empty. All emptiness is form. (*se ji shi kong, kong ji shi se* 色即是空,空即是色)." And the Confucians extol the "Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyang* 中庸)," a middle path towards self-perfection. The Chinese believe that an exercise regimen must balance stillness and movement.

Whether you are middle-aged or elderly, you can practice some aerobic exercises. In the long run, the internal systems are the best choice. While each system has its own unique internal training methods, there are features within *Baguazhang* that no other internal martial art offers. For example, circle walking is the basic method for *Baguazhang*. The upper body is held in stillness while the lower body moves. The body moves on the outside, but on the inside – stillness. Here, winning motions are practiced simultaneously while cultivating stillness, the static and the dynamic are combined, and attacks are dissolved as strikes are delivered, all in each movement. Cultivation and training are all in one. By following the *Dao* of nature, *Baguazhang* is an ideal exercise for preventing sickness and improving physical fitness. And it is consistent with the yin and yang of the Five Elements. It exemplifies the principles espoused in the venerated traditional Chinese medical treatise, The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic (*Huangdi Neijing* 黄帝内经). *Baguazhang* is a form of martial arts derived from Daoist health concepts.

Baguazhang's special footwork, known as mud stepping (*tangnibu* 趟泥步), turns left (yang) and turns right (yin). Meanwhile, the upper body turns inward to face the center at the same time, both revolving and rotating. This twisting of yin and yang constantly squeezes the internal organs and massages them. Combining this with conscious breathing techniques is the gateway to obtain universal good qi and nourish your own internal strength. With the rising and falling *Baguazhang* movements and the deliberate relaxation while walking, accumulated blood in the legs and waist flow back to the heart, increasing the blood circulation to the heart. This circulation helps to improve the chemical composition of the blood and stimulates metabolism to increase cell viability.

In *Baguazhang* training, the first objective is to consolidate your own inner vitality, and then expel useless corrupt qi from your body. Exhale the old and inhale the new. In the past, most exercises were to strengthen and nourish your body. But the body may have some stagnant parts and meridian blockages, so the absorption of nutrients will encounter obstacles if these are not improved. In this case, first you must consolidate your own strength and enhance your physical fitness. At the same time, you must refine yourself to improve blood circulation and balance your endocrine system so that your internal organs can sort out the diseases. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (402–581 CE), Tao Hongjing (456–536 陶弘景) was a prominent Daoist scholar and alchemist. Known as Huayang Yinju (Hua Yang Hermit 华阳隐居), he authored many books. In *Extracts on Nourishing Spiritual Nature and Prolonging Bodily Life* (*Yangsheng Yanming Lu* 養生延命錄), he wrote, "Qi, inhale from the nose, exhale from the mouth. Inhale Qi slowly and long without strength." One of his cornerstone comments was, "There is one way to inhale and six ways to exhale (*na qi you yi, tu qi you liu* 纳气有一，吐气有六)." This is the first description of the Six Healing Sounds (*Liu Zi Jue* 六字訣), one of the most common methods of Qigong. The one way to inhale is through the nose. The six ways to exhale are while voicing the sounds *chui* (吹), *hu* (呼), *xi* (唏), *he* (呵), *xu* (噓) and *si* (嘶). In these six methods, the most commonly used exhalation sound is *xu* (pronounced "she" with the lips rounded). The exhalation method with *xu* is in line with the continuous long length of breathing espoused by Tao. The *xu* sound focuses on discharging bad qi from the organs, strengthening the liver and improving the effectiveness of blood circulation. The Six Healing Sounds center around discharging, which has a significant effect on alleviating chronic illnesses. *Baguazhang* ancestors created this system with the intention to preserve these Daoist health benefits while retaining martial ability.

Two *Baguazhang* exercises are well suited for this sort of longevity cultivation practice: Twin Dragons Tame the Tiger (双龙伏虎) and Tanuki Catches Mice (狸猫捕鼠). Before practicing them, first do some stretching exercises to activate your various joints and muscle groups. It's important to wake up the various parts of your body before entering practice to prevent injury. Have your hair loose. Remove all shackles – jewelry, watches and things of this sort. Wear loose clothing. Calm your mind, look inward and sink your qi to your *dantian* (energy center 丹田).

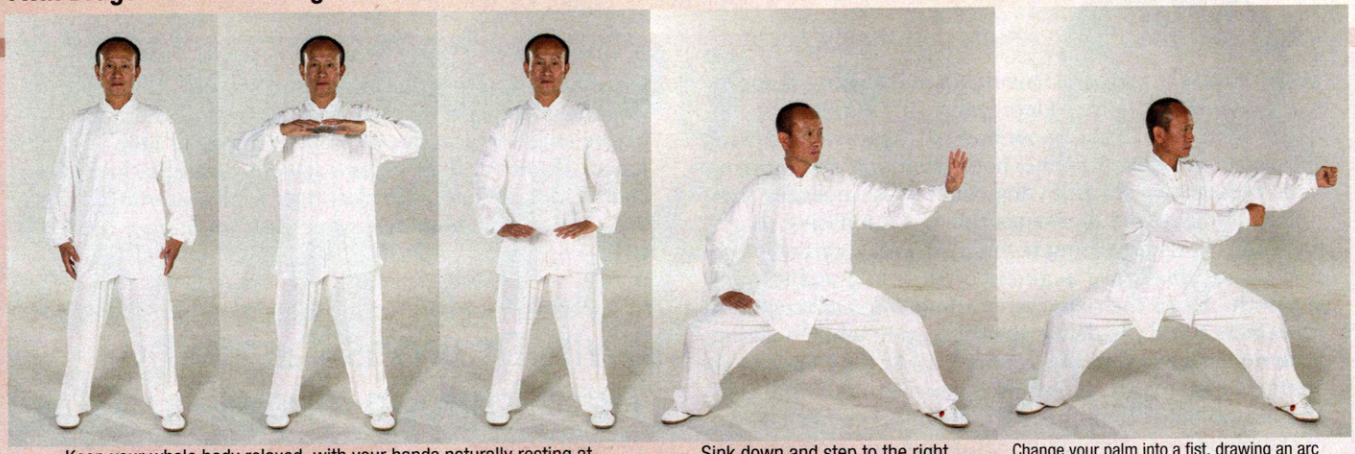
Twin Dragons Tame the Tiger (*shuang long fu hu* 双龙伏虎)

The external aspect of this practice is in the deep squatting stance that works the thigh muscles, reducing the press on the knees. It also strengthens the abdominal muscles and helps to massage the internal organs. Increasing the abdominal pressure promotes the exclusion of wasteful qi from the body. The internal aspect is in squatting down and rising up. This simple movement, combined with your breathing, exercises the internal circulatory system so as to increase the flexibility of the blood vessels. However, squatting down so deeply will cause the blood and qi to rise, so it is not recommended for the elderly person. By exhaling with the *hai* (嗨) sound, the internal qi can return to the *dantian*, easing the inversion of blood and balancing its rise and fall.

Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Inhale as your body rises using "reverse abdominal breathing." This means to make your abdomen slightly concave as you inhale, raising your diaphragm. Exhale as your body squats down. Relax your abdomen so it is naturally convex, and sink your diaphragm. At the same time, make a quiet *hai* sound as your fists touch the ground. The sound should only be loud enough so you can hear it, but no one else. Exhale qi from your chest out through your throat. Traditional Daoist Qigong Theory believes that reverse abdominal breathing lets the body's innate qi ascend to the chest. Through the inhalation, the naturally acquired qi gravitates into the chest. Naturally acquired qi is the essence of heaven and earth, and sun and moon. The exhalation expels toxic qi. During the exhalation, with the abdomen naturally convex, the useful qi is returned to the dantian to nourish your body. Reverse abdominal breathing also leads the water element in the kidney from below to rise up and meet the heart element of fire. When water and fire meet, do not focus the mind too much or a dry mouth may result while practicing.

Tanuki Catches Mice (*li mao Pu shu* 狸猫捕鼠)

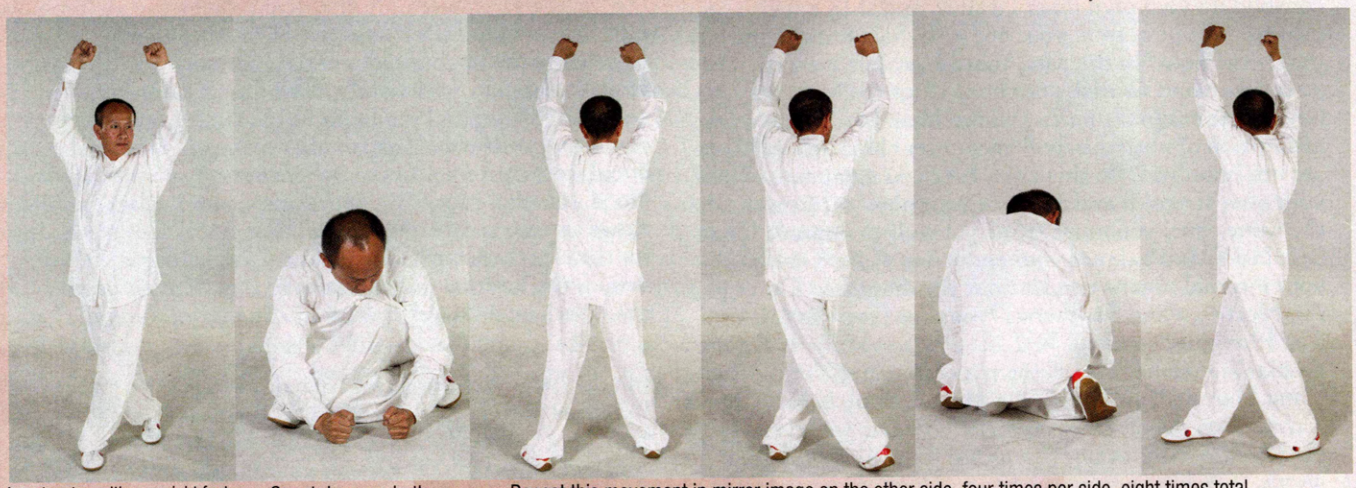
This exercise follows the *Baguazhang* strategy, "Avoid a frontal attack with an oblique strike, dissolve and strike



Keep your whole body relaxed, with your hands naturally resting at the sides of your body.

Sink down and step to the right into a three unit stance (*santi shi* 三体式) with a left palm thrust.

Change your palm into a fist, drawing an arc downward to the right, and then draw an arc upward to the right, passing in front of your face to the left. Your left fist is forward with your right fist under your left elbow. Your shoulders are naturally relaxed.



Insert a step with your right foot behind your left foot while both fists draw an arc to go around and over your head. When the arc begins, inhale through your nose with reverse abdominal breathing. Exhale with a *hai* sound when both fists move downward from the apex of the arc.

Squat down so both fists touch the ground and complete your exhalation when they touch.

Repeat this movement in mirror image on the other side, four times per side, eight times total.

Conclude by raising your fists, drawing an arc and ending with your left fist in front and your right fist under your left elbow. Then rise upwards, turning your waist into a horse stance, breathing naturally.

are one (*bi zheng ji xie, hua da he yi* 避正击斜，化打合一)." In order to maintain the martial application, you must relax the waist and hips, sink down, turn your waist to dissolve incoming power and push and press simultaneously. While turning the waist, the internal organs are massaged. Combine this with reverse abdominal breathing, exhaling with the *xu* sound to expel unwanted qi from your body.

Using reverse abdominal breathing, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. The *xu* sound corresponds with the liver. The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic states that liver stores blood, controls dispersion and is in charge of the tendons. It says, "Liver opens to the eyes." Therefore, when practicing this exercise and exhaling with the *xu* sound, open your eyes wide as if you are angry. Angry eyes are another diffusion channel. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that the liver is located in between two ribs. It's not the anatomical definition of the liver in Western medicine. Daily life stress and excessive thinking cause liver stagnation. This can cause bloating in the stomach, which is why you can't eat when angry. When the stomach circulation is poor, the

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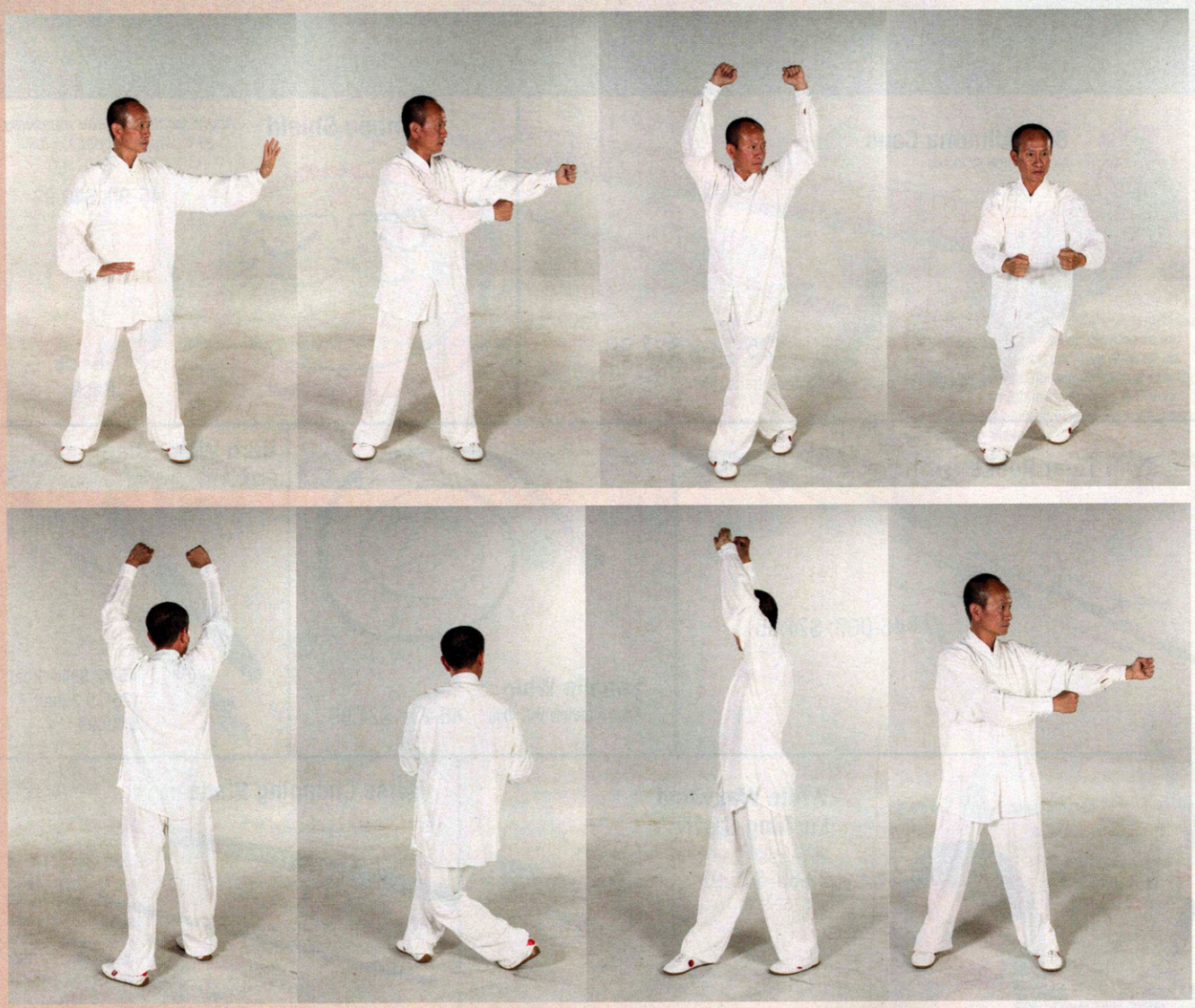
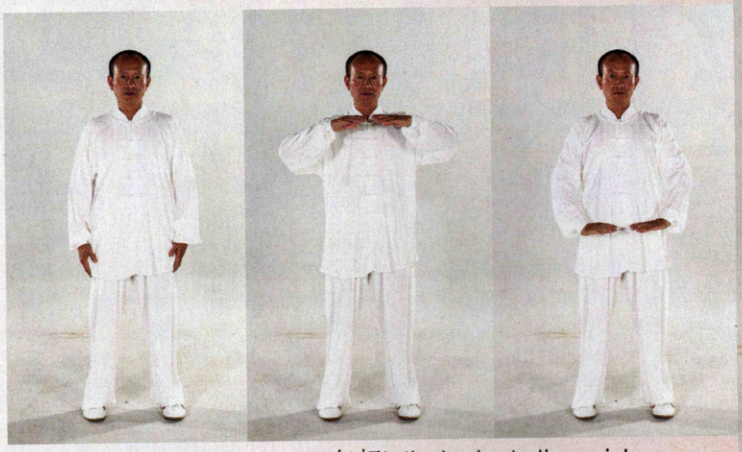


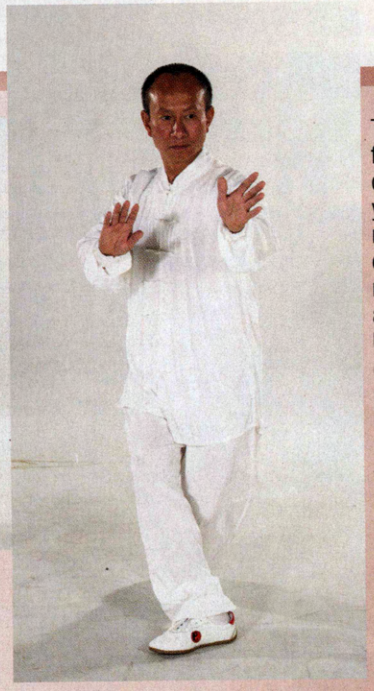
For elderly practitioners, this must be approached step by step. Do not squat or stand up suddenly, and move slowly. At first, only practice on the upper body. Squat ever so slightly. The fists do not have to touch the ground. After accumulating some skill at it, practice on the middle body. Move slightly faster and squat a little deeper. Regardless of upper, middle or lower body practice, the most important part is the reverse abdominal breathing.

reaction is indigestion, gassiness, and bad breath. This exercise is a dispelling method to reduce liver stagnation and promote internal circulation. Turning left and right ninety degrees massages the ribs, and combined with reverse abdominal breathing, the rising and settling of qi can be regulated. The body absorbs the essence of heaven and earth to nourish the original qi and expel bad qi. When practicing, focus on mind, not force. Exhale with a thin long breath making the *xu* sound, gradually widening your eyes until they look angry.☯

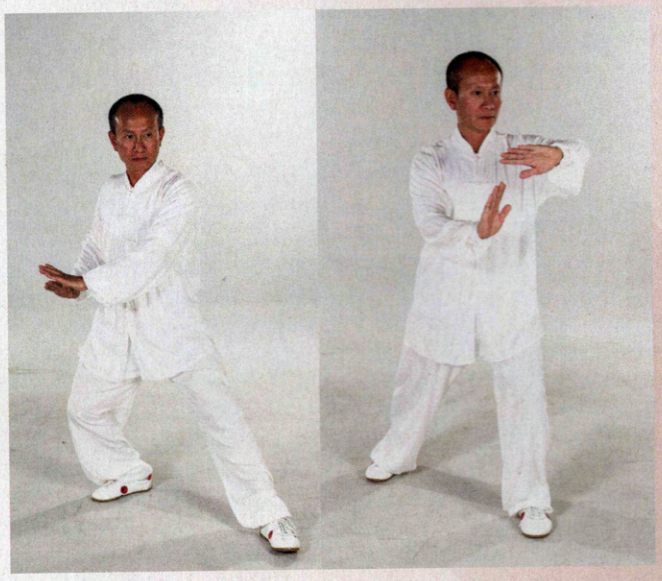
Master Liang Keming (梁克明) grew up learning Baguazhang and Taijiquan from his father, Master Liang Qiangya (梁强亚). He is a 5th generation descendant of Baguazhang and an inheritor of Fu-style Baguazhang, derived from Dong Haichuan's disciple Jia Qishan (贾岐山), then passed to Grandmaster Fu Zhensong (傅振嵩). Master Liang's father was one of the few indoor disciples of Grandmaster Fu. For additional reading, visit KungFuMagazine.com for "*The Influence of Traditional Chinese Culture on Baguazhang*," an exclusive article also by Master Liang Keming. For video of Master Liang demonstrating Twin Dragons Tame the Tiger and Tanuki Catches Mice, visit KungFuMagazine.com's YouTube channel.



Begin in *wuji* (boundless 無極), the basic starting point of internal styles.



Turn to your left forty-five degrees, sink downward and move your right toes to point right. Shift your center of gravity to the right, relax your shoulders and drop your elbows. Use the Taiji method *lu* (pull back 捋) with your palms drawing an arc. Use reverse abdominal breathing inhaling through your nose.



Push out with your palms at the same time you take a left bow stance. Exhale through your mouth with a *xu* sound, widening your eyes gradually, and pushing out with your left palm with fingers at chest height pointing to the right. Your right palm faces outwards, fingertips pointing up and placed under your left palm.

Repeat this movement in mirror image on the other side, four times per side, eight times total. Focus on being mindful, using reverse abdominal breathing, making the *xu* sound, and widening your eyes.