

# Yi's Life Song: Tai chi, herbs and acupuncture

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STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GORDON

Yi Song leads one of the 72 tai chi moves during a recent class. Song commonly sits down with new clients and discusses what medications they are taking. Oftentimes she can alleviate a problem without even recommending anything else.

As soothing Asian music played in the background, Yi Song led a small class of students through tai chi movements.

"...step the right heel forward ... left fist forward, relax elbows ... left foot comes up..."

Song, whose first name means "brilliant" in Chinese when referring to the sun, has become a shining star for many of her clients. Through her multipronged approach of being the founder and director of Holli Balance Well-Being Center she applies tai chi, acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, massage and more to her client's ailments.

"...inhale, open the fist ... shift weight to the left ... exhale ... inhale, shift weight to the right..."

Tai chi derives from Chinese martial arts and has more than 108 moves, but Song teaches 72 at her 530 VFW Parkway suite. But through hundreds of years tai chi has developed into a series of movements for health purposes. Song said tai chi most importantly "promotes the flow of chi, your personal energy."

Song, 31, of West Roxbury, came from China in 1997 to get her Ph.D in pathology at Brown University. She began learning tai chi in college in China. But she didn't take tai chi seriously until four years ago.

"My mother was diagnosed with osteoporosis and she started doing tai chi seriously. She brought my interest back," said Song. "Tai chi fits my schedule. It calms my mind and reduces my stress from running my business."

Song also stresses the preventive properties of tai chi, which her clients can testify to.

Erika Keller Rogoff, of Newton, 64, has been taking tai chi from Song for two years, and her doctors are amazed with her recovery from two hip replacements.

"The doctors couldn't believe how well I was walking and my balance," said Rogoff. "It really has been from the tai chi. Yi doesn't correct people [during classes]. After a while, you are doing it well. It's energizing. I leave feeling very, very good. It works my body."

George Stephenson, 74, of Dover, started doing tai chi 10 years ago after he was diagnosed with arthritis

in his hip and eventually had a hip replacement operation.

Today, Stephenson looks smooth as he follows Song's instructions in her sunlit studio, which has an adjacent room where she performs acupuncture. She operates her Chinese herbal pharmacy out of her West Roxbury home.

"I put off surgery. Tai chi made me stronger. The doctor and physical therapist people said 'you don't know how well [tai chi] has helped'. It makes you very strong. It's great for balance," said Stephenson. Stephenson added that tai chi can be done strenuously or relaxed.

Neither Stephenson nor Rogoff said they've combined acupuncture or Chinese herbs into their health regimens.

But Song strongly advocates for all of her clients to take advantage of everything that she offers, which can help prevent disease and health problems.

Song commonly sits down with new clients and discusses what medications they are taking. Oftentimes she can alleviate a problem without even recommending anything else. Song said one of her clients, a 70-year-old man, came to her with a host of problems, including a bone marrow disease, a hoarse voice and sexual dysfunction.



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Yi Song teaches a tai chi class at her studio on the VFW Parkway. Song came from China in 1997 to get her Ph.D in pathology at Brown University. She began learning tai chi in college in China. But she didn't take tai chi seriously until four years ago.

She quickly established that his taking of a steroid inhaler was unnecessary and once he stopped taking it, he regained his voice. She has also helped him with his other ailments by recommending Chinese herbal remedies.

"I give people a lot of recommendations and look at the medications they're taking. I ask them to talk to their doctors," said Song.

Song said she commonly works with about 200 to 400 Chinese herbs that she purchases from a distributor out of San Francisco that gets them directly from China. But she has several giant tomes that talk about more than 40,000 Chinese herbs. Song said that if she thinks one of her clients would prosper from having a rare herb, she would import it. She added that Chinese herbal medicine uses very complex formulas, often containing more than 20 herbs in one concoction. She added that she might create two formulas for different people who seem to be suffering from the same ailment. Song said the

root of a problem, or another personal matter, may cause her to use different herbs.

As an example of why Song doesn't get her herbs from Boston's Chinatown is the polygonum herb, or literally translated from Chinese "black-haired Mr. He." It helps keep away gray hairs.

"If you get it from Chinatown, it goes through many middlemen," said Song.

The problem with that is that it may not have been prepared in the correct manner. The herb needs to be boiled with black beans for 16 hours. Sometimes it may be received after it has been boiled for only two hours and the herb will be brown instead of black. There's also a slightly toxic ingredient in the herb that can be boiled away from the needed 16 hours. The herb will also only reach its best therapeutic value if boiled correctly.

Song said she has helped clients cure and alleviate ailments such as anxiety, sexual dysfunction, skin diseases, wrinkles and more.

"Chinese medicine is not just to cure disease. It always emphasizes early prevention. Start early to prevent wrinkles. With any disease, you can recognize the predisposition to the disease," said Song.

Song said sometimes not drinking icy cold drinks could stop acid reflux.

But it's not older clients that Song works with. She has one client who is 5 years old and is suffering from a birth defect of brainstem development. Acupuncture has helped this Child alleviate some of her problems, said Song.

But tai chi can always help prevent some of the problems that Song's clients eventually come complaining about.

"... right hand forms a hook ... exhale ... turn both toes ... release hook ... gliding right arm ... raise right leg..."

"A lot of people think that tai chi is for older people. But it's a workout. I was sweating today," said Song. "It's not less aerobic exercise, people think it's slow moving. Comparing tai chi to current trends in the fitness field, Chinese medicine is customized for everyone."

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