

## Thoughts on “The Roots of Classical Qigong” by Bill Porter

I recently read an article by Master Wu Zhongxian which appeared in the Winter 2003 issue of Empty Vessel. The name of the article is “Seeking the Roots of Classical Qigong;” I am very impressed with Master Wu’s approach, as well as with the clarity of his presentation and depth of his knowledge and would like to share a few comments with readers.

As a result of Mao’s Great Leap Backward, most of the practitioners of spiritual traditions in China were killed, jailed, or forced to keep their mouths shut and their practices secret -- or to live as hermits. It wasn’t until about 1980 that the Chinese government actually began to pay lip-service to the principle of religious freedom. Individual and group practice, however, has remained, and remains today, under the constant threat of government whim and paranoia. Thus, we are fortunate to find authentic teachers of China’s religious traditions surviving, much less developing, under such conditions. Hence, I congratulate Master Wu on his dedication to acquiring a thorough knowledge of the origins and deeper significance of qigong as well as on his efforts to share that knowledge with the West.

The subtitle of Master Wu’s article is “Exploring the Original Meaning of the Pure Yang Mudra.” While we in the West have come to associate mudras, or potent hand gestures, with the Tantrayana school of Buddhism, they have formed an essential part of the shamanic-Taoist tradition of China for as long as records go back. And it remains an open question whether mudras arose from the trigrams of Fu Xi around 3500 B.C., or whether, in fact, they inspired Fu Xi’s trigrams and thus compilation of the Yijing, or Book of Changes. In any case, mudras have been among the most potent forms of practice in the preliterate traditions of Taoism as well as Buddhism and Hinduism. And the cultivation of mudras, or any qigong practice for that matter, without a knowledge of origins, meaning, and relationships inevitably leads to misunderstanding as well as to misuse and ultimately to failure. Hence, I hope readers will take a closer look at Master Wu’s article and consider its ramifications for their own practice, regardless of whether or not it involves the use of mudras. I also hope we will see more such articles from Master Wu in the future and hopefully a book about the roots of classical qigong.

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*About the Reviewer:* Bill Porter has lived in Taiwan and Hong Kong for more than twenty years and is a student of Buddhism and Taoism. He is the author of *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*. Under his pen name, Red Pine, he has also published a number of translations from Chinese and Sanskrit, including *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, *Lao-Tzu’s Tao Te Ching*, *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, and most recently *The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom*. He currently lives in Port Townsend, Washington.

Seeking the Roots of Classical Qigong by Master Zhongxian Wu  
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