

Impact of intensive zhènéng qìgōng practice on participants' happiness during a three-day retreat.

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Summary

Zhènéng qìgōng is a type of qìgōng that is easy to practice and very effective in strengthening human capabilities and awakening wisdom. Happiness is a positive emotional state characterized by contentment and well-being. The present project aimed to analyze the impact of intensive practice of zhènéng qìgōng on the happiness of 42 students who practiced 7 hours a day for 3 consecutive days. At the end of the retreat, the participants increased their perception of happiness.

Keywords – zhènéngqìgōng, happiness, retreat, meditation.

I. Introduction

Qì gōng (chikon)

Qìgōng is a Chinese cultural treasure; historically, Confucianists found it essential for studying and cultivating, Taoists saw it as the secret to achieving long life, Buddhists considered it the path to enlightenment, and physicians revered it as the supreme method for eliminating disease (Páng year 1994/2021).

In a simplistic way it can be said that traditional qìgōng are systems of Chinese origin involving meditations, breathing, mantras, mudras, sounds and body exercises whose effectiveness in eliminating diseases, strengthening the body and prolonging the life expectancy of practitioners has been studied and accepted since ancient times (Ooi,2010).

Páng He Ming in Introduction to the Science of zhìnéng qìgōng (1994/2021, p. 25) defines modern qìgōng as follows:

“qìgōng is based on the holistic theory of life and is practiced through the active and focused use of mental activity (the regulation of mind, body, and breath are its extensions), to transform, perfect, and improve the vital functions of the human body, converting natural instincts into conscious and intelligent practice.”

The author describes that this definition is complete because it includes: theory, method and purpose.

1.The theoretical basis of qìgōng involves a holistic view of life, where the universe and nature are a whole, the human being is a whole, and the human being and nature are one.

2.Qìgōng is a practical process of perfecting the body and mind through the use of specific methods. The methods of qìgōng promote an internal use of consciousness by combining it with one's own life activities and focusing inward.

3. And the purpose is to achieve transformation, perfection of indispensable functions, beautify the figure, enhance wisdom, elevate noble character and develop potential by freeing people from physical and mental attachments to enter a state of freedom of consciousness (Páng 1994/2021).

Zhìnéng qìgōng (ṭzinen chikon)

Zhìnéng qìgōng is a type of qìgōng created in the 80's by master and doctor Páng He Ming. Master Páng combined ancient wisdom (techniques from various styles of traditional qìgōng, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and martial arts) with modern knowledge of medicine, philosophy, and science to generate a massive, easy-to-practice and effective type of qìgōng (Páng, 1994/2013; Páng 1993/2021).

The characteristics of zhìnéng qìgōng are:

- Uses as a theoretical system the holistic entity theory hùnyuán (everything and everybody are one).
- It has a system of exercises: dynamic, static and dynamic-static.
- It combines the best of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, medicine, martial arts and traditional qìgōng and arranges them into a whole.
- It combines 3 forms of teaching (heart-to-heart, oral and physical).
- Does not use special mental activities (consciousness does not pursue anything special).
- Uses the induction of qì to move the qì of the body (with the mind, with body movements and with sounds).
- Treats diseases with external qì and does not harm one's own qì.
- It produces reactions to the practice (mainly pain).
- It is designed to be practiced on a mass level, and
- Its methods are effective, easy to succeed and complete (Páng, 1994/2013; Páng 1993/2021).

This profound holistic work when practiced constantly and diligently results in the strengthening of the human being's capacities and the awakening of the wisdom (DeMing, 2018; Páng, 1998/1999).

Happiness

Sanchez (2019), mentions that happiness is a positive emotional state characterized by satisfaction and well-being. It is the feeling that everything will be fine, that relationships are going positively and feeling cheerful in the environment.

However, Margot (2007), indicates that happiness is not reduced to the affective well-being of the person adapted to his/her environment; happiness also depends on the freedom and responsibility of actions, so to be happy, it is necessary to achieve a balance that overcomes personal conflicts also taking into account others.

On the other hand, to understand happiness, it is important to consider neuronal connections, neurotransmitters and the functioning of the human brain. In this regard,

Deschamps and collaborators (2020), refer that there are several studies that indicate that happiness is a neuronal reaction, which is promoted by a series of neurotransmitters (such as serotonin, dopamine, prolactin, oxytocin and gamma-aminobutyric acid). The authors state that neuroscience shows that we are capable of learning to voluntarily produce in our brain a neurochemical state of happiness and well-being. They also mention that these neurotransmitters have a positive effect at the cardiovascular level, finding a relationship with other chronic diseases such as hypertension or type 2 diabetes. They also point out that happiness strengthens the immune system by increasing the production of antibodies and modulating the immune response and induces the production of telomerase, delaying aging. Therefore, they conclude that levels of well-being and happiness positively influence people's health, decreasing cardiovascular risk, inflammatory states and even delaying cellular aging.

Since qìgōng is an effective millenary cultural treasure for strengthening human capacities and awakening wisdom, the project **aimed** to analyze the impact of the intensive practice of zhìnéng qìgōng on the happiness of 42 students who practiced 7 hours a day for 3 days in a row.

Background qìgōng and happiness.

There are a variety of articles where authors have studied how through qìgōng practice can reduce depression, anxiety and stress (Wang et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2013; Chow et al., 2012; Griffith et al., 2008; Chow and Tsang, 2007). Of course, by reducing these factors the level of happiness and well-being increases, even we have measured these aspects as well (Alvarez et al., in the process of publication). Oblitas et al. (2018), list a series of studies with qìgōng and its health benefits in various aspects. However, we found that the number of published projects in English and Spanish studying happiness and qìgōng is very small. Certainly, it is very likely that in other languages there is more research combining these two aspects.

Specifically, Salehiam et al. (2021), conducted a study with 45 mothers with disabled children in Iran using qìgōng and Islamic concepts as intervention methods to increase happiness. The authors concluded that both methods aided in the increase of happiness in the mothers compared to the control group.

II. Methodology

The retreat took place at Rancho el rincconcito located in Santiago Acutzilapan, State of Mexico, Mexico. The students arrived a day before starting the retreat to settle in and receive the informative talk about the research project, doubts were answered and both the letters of informed consent and the letters of use of image were signed.

The following day, before starting the retreat, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) (Hills & Argyle, 2002), was applied to obtain baseline measures (Fig. 1). The questionnaire consists of 29 items that are scored using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, so that higher scores are equivalent to higher levels of subjective well-being. For interpretation the sum is divided by 29 obtaining the final score equivalent to: Not happy; Somewhat unhappy; Not particularly happy or unhappy; Somewhat happy or moderately happy; Very happy and Too happy.

The group of students who participated in the retreat consisted of 42 people, of whom 36 were women and 6 were men, ranging in age from 21 to 81 years (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Students answering the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire before starting the retreat (baseline measures).



Figure 2. Retreat participants.

For the next 3 and a half days zhìnéng qìgōng was taught and practiced intensively for 7 hours a day with periods of rest to relax and to eat food.

The instruction (theory and practice) was guided in English by 2 Chinese zhìnéng qìgōng teachers and translated into Spanish by 2 Mexican teachers. The methods practiced during the retreat were: organizing the field, wall squats, lifting and pouring qì by the head, and sounds and mudras of the 5 zang organs. In addition, there were group healing sessions and qì experiments such as: bending spoons, cutting and gluing cucumbers and magnetizing pins (figs. 3-5).

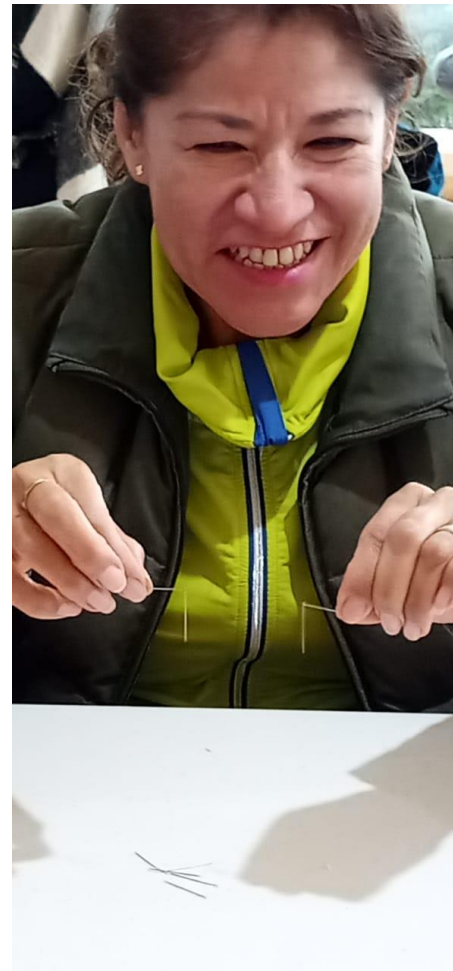


Figure 3. Students magnetizing pins.



Figure 4. Students bending spoons.



Figure 5. Student testing how much weight her stuck cucumber could carry.

At the end of the third day of the retreat, the students answered the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (final measures) again.

For the analysis of the data obtained, the Student's t-test for related samples was performed.

III. Analysis of results

A total of 42 pre-practice questionnaires were applied, of which three were eliminated, two for not having post-application and one for being incomplete. Of the 42 post-practice questionnaires, three were also eliminated, two for not having a previous questionnaire and one for being incomplete. Therefore, the size of the sample analyzed is 39 participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency analysis of the variable Number of Participants.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pre	39	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Pos	39	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

In the results of the Pre-practice application, it was found that 2.6% (1) of the participants considered themselves "Somewhat unhappy", 12.8% (5) "Not particularly happy or unhappy", 20.5% (8) "Somewhat happy or moderately happy", 25% (10) "Quite happy", 38.5% (15) "Very happy" (Table 2, Figure 6).

Table 2. Frequency analysis of the results obtained from the Pre-practice Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.

Pre-Practice Oxford Happiness Questionnaire					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat unhappy	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Not particularly happy or unhappy	5	12.8	12.8	15.4
	Somewhat happy or moderately happy	8	20.5	20.5	35.9
	Quite happy	10	25.6	25.6	61.5
	Very happy	15	38.5	38.5	100.0
	Total	39	100.0	100.0	

Pre-practice Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

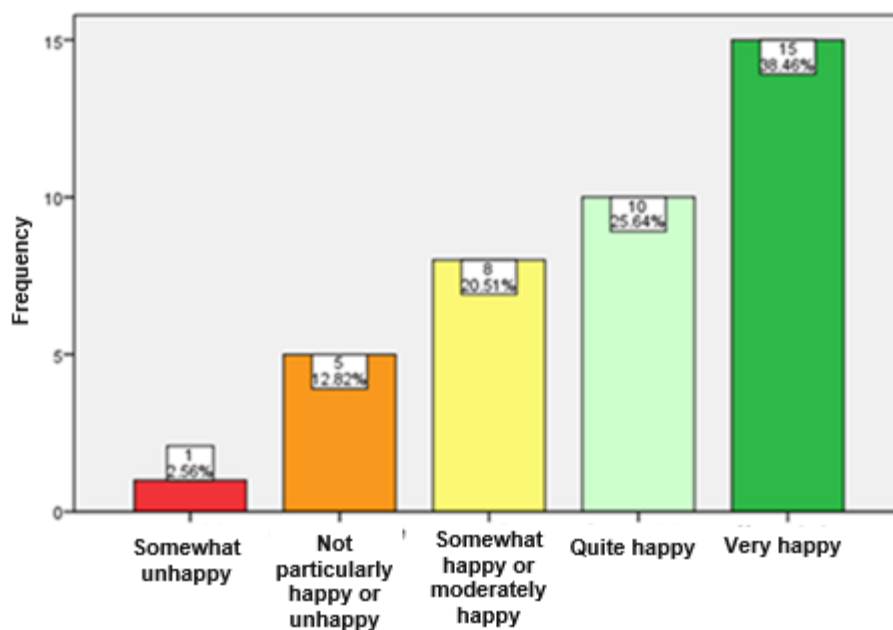


Figure 6. Graph of the frequency analysis of the results obtained from the Pre-practice Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.

In the Post-Practice application, it was found that 2.6% (1) of the participants consider themselves "Not particularly happy or unhappy", 10.3% (4) "Somewhat happy or moderately happy", 12.8% (5) "Quite happy" and, finally, 74.4% (29) "Very happy" (Table 3, Figure 7).

Table 3. Frequency analysis of the results obtained from the Oxford Post-Practice Happiness Questionnaire.

Oxford Happiness Quiz Post-Practice					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat unhappy	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Not particularly happy or unhappy	4	10.3	10.3	12.8
	Somewhat happy or moderately happy	5	12.8	12.8	25.6
	Quite happy	29	74.4	74.4	100.0
	Very happy	39	100.0	100.0	

Pos-practice Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

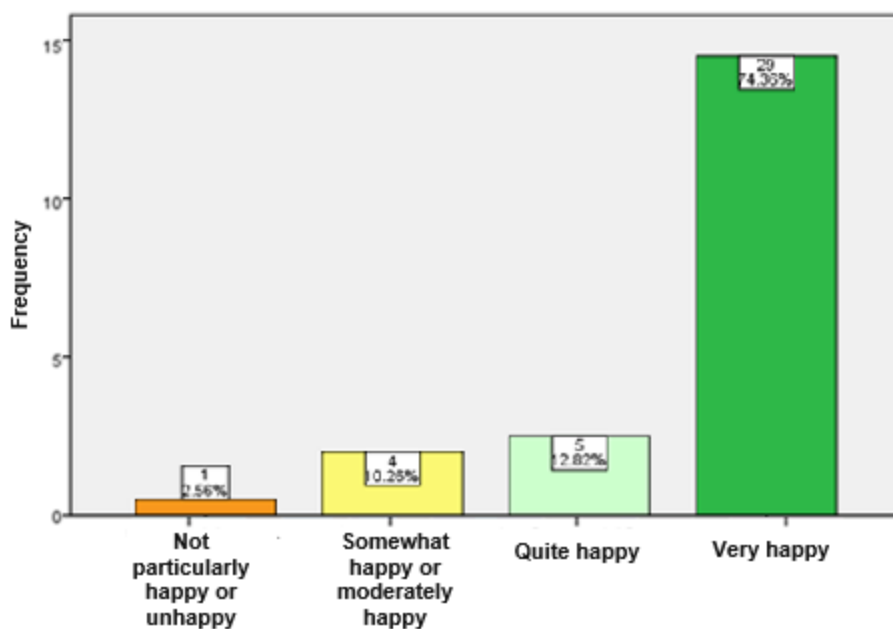


Figure 7. Graph of the frequency analysis of the results obtained from the Oxford Post-Practice Happiness Questionnaire.

From the above, a difference tending to greater well-being is observed. To find out if the difference is statistically significant, a student's t-test was performed for related samples in

which a t-value of -.163 was observed, df = 38 degrees of freedom and $p = 0.000$ which is less than 0.05 so the happiness between the first and second measurement is statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 4. Test of related samples for the variables "post-practice" and "pre-practice".

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pos - Pre	.58179	.51628	.08267	.41443	.74915	7.037	38	.000

IV. Conclusion

Intensive practice of zhìnéng qìgōng in a 3-day retreat improved participants' perception of happiness.

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