

4 Week Shibashi Course

Origins and Purpose of Shibashi

Taiji Qigong Shibashi is :

a Qigong (energy/breath exercise)

that is based on Taijiquan

and has Eighteen (ShiBa = ten + eight) Movements (Shi).

It is an active Qigong that uses movements adapted from Yang style Taijiquan. It was devised in 1979 by Professor Lin Hou-Sheng, a renowned Qigong Master at the Shanghai Qigong Research Institute, assisted by Master He Weiqi, a Yang Taijiquan teacher. Shibashi is intended to offer the health benefits of practising Taiji forms, but be simpler and quicker to learn. This follows the general modern (last 150 years or so!) trend of practising the internal arts for their health benefits, and of finding ways of making the exercises easier to learn and quicker to perform.

Shibashi offers a low intensity aerobic workout. Its use of abdominal breathing promotes relaxation and can help to reduce stress induced health issues. Its main aim is to generate Qi in the limbs so that it reaches a high level and pushes through the Meridians. Its various postures are designed to strengthen Qi and encourage Qi flow in different Meridians and thus promote good health. The Chinese notions of the body mean that the practice will encourage the development of all of the Three Treasures (Qi, Jing and Shen). Thus, Shibashi can be thought of as promoting wellness; it works to regulate all aspects of our being and so promotes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Safe Posture in Taiji / Shibashi

The human body is able to move in a great variety of ways. However, this versatility can allow the body to move outside of its safe limits. Doing so can easily cause acute or chronic injury. The principles of Taiji are designed to avoid this. In particular, the movements are designed to avoid the three main weakness of the body:

1. Our upright posture creates a weakness in the back, particularly when it is bent or lent to oneside. We avoid this in Shibashi by keeping the back upright.
2. Our joints, particularly knees, elbows, ankles and hips, are prone to hyperextension (extending beyond their safe limit) which can cause ligament damage or muscle injury. By keeping our movements within their natural range, and being particularly aware of alignment through the legs Shibashi avoids hyperextension and thus avoids the risk of injury.
3. The inguinal canal has a tendency to herniate. This is ameliorated in Shibashi by avoiding long or deep stances.

We will work down through the body looking at the main details of how we apply the Taiji principles to our posture.

Shibashi practice stresses maintaining a straight and vertical spine to minimise the risk of back injury. The head should be held erect with the Baihui point (the apex of the head on the straight line between the points of the ears) uppermost. This naturally tucks the chin inwards slightly. The neck muscles should be relaxed; the head should feel suspended from the Baihui point but not straining upwards. This should allow the back of neck to rest against the collar. The hips should be level with the pelvis tipped neither forwards nor backwards. This naturally tucks the coccyx inwards and straightens the lower spine. It also brings the Huiyin (the perineum) and the Baihui (crown) points into vertical alignment. Maintaining this alignment will keep the spine straight and vertical and so reduce the risk of back injury. A straight back also aids abdominal breathing, which is an important element of Shibashi practice.

The legs should be kept slightly bent throughout Shibashi practice. This promotes stability and helps to facilitate a sense of rooting. It allows the body to turn at the waist without causing too much twist to be exerted on the legs. Bending the legs too much will tend to risk hyperextension of the knees; a good guide is that the knee angle should always be greater than 120 degrees whilst the knee is under load. In Shibashi practice the knee angle is somewhat greater than this; more like 160 degrees, enough to promote rooting and avoid torsional strain on the knees, whilst not risking hyperextension.

The knee should always be kept pointing in the same direction as the foot. This avoids excessive torsion of the knee joint. The knee should also remain over the foot. In particular, when we take a long step forward, the knee of the front leg must remain behind the toes of the front foot (you should be able to see your toes when you look down) to avoid hyperextension of the knee. Likewise, when sinking into the back leg, keeping the knee over the foot avoids the knee from bending in the wrong axis (either sideways outwards or inwards).

The Jeixi point (front of the ankle where the leg meets the foot) should also be in vertical alignment with the Huiyin and Baihui points. This ensures that the posture is upright and not leaning forward or backwards.

The foot contacts the ground at nine points: the toes, the small ball, the large ball, the outer edge of the instep and the heel. The weight should be evenly distributed across all nine points which centres the weight on the Yongquan point (Bubbling spring) at the centre of the foot. This helps to ensure that the weight is being evenly distributed through the ankle joint. During Shibashi the feet should be relaxed and sunk into the floor so that all nine contact points firmly connect with the ground. Relaxing the feet gives the feeling of the toes gripping the floor. However, the toes should not be pinched as if trying to pick up tissue paper as this introduces tension and tends to lift the other contact points.

When moving care should be taken to maintain the Three External Unities which help to maintain the alignments required for safe posture:

1. The shoulders and hips should traverse in the same general direction and should not oppose each other's movement.
2. The elbows and knees should move in the same general direction, and not in opposition.
3. The wrists and ankles should also have the same general direction of travel.

Care should also be taken to maintain the Three Bows which also help to maintain the alignments required for safe posture:

1. The pelvis should remain level, tucking the coccyx inwards and straightening the lower back. (A vertical bow between torso and legs).
2. The elbows should always stay low and relaxed, but not collapsed into the body. The arms should be rounded, the shoulders relaxed with a slightly sunken chest. (A horizontal bow from one arm through the torso to the other arm).
3. The knees should always strive to bow outwards. This is to counter the natural tendency of the knees to collapse inwards. It is important not to press the knees outwards too much; the knee must remain over the foot to avoid the knee from trying to bend outwards in the wrong axis.