

A Wide Gathering of Chi

In Chinese internal arts, there exists a discipline for strengthening intrinsic energy called Gathering Chi. There are various exercises one can perform to harmonize internal organs, release toxins, or simply unlock energy. I have never studied these methods, and do not claim to know either how to do them or how well they work. So why is a Japanese-style practitioner like I bothering to write a blog on an internal Chinese practice?

Well, to be frank, I am not. Rather, I am using the term in a much larger sense to refer to something else. *Chi* (Chinese), *Ki* (Japanese and Korean), or *Prana* (Indian) is personal intrinsic energy or life force; so, one might ask, how can I possibly talk about Gathering Chi as a much larger concept? Just as the mood of the country or of the economy has a “spirit”, so too does the mood of the martial arts world.

Part of this spirit is determined by what is popular at the time. When judo was the only martial discipline popular in the USA, its unified spirit was fractured by two organizations competing to govern the sport. Then karate became more popular. It not only had several major systems from which to choose, but also it was not simply a sport, but self-defense, as well. Then kung-fu showed up with its myriad systems. It was not a sport at all, but either self-defense or athletic exhibition. Following that, there was a decade-long dalliance with nin-jutsu—back to pure self-defense. In the same period, full-contact karate became fashionable—so the general martial spirit returned to sport again, but a rougher and more “realistic” sport, at least in regards to the contact aspect. So, the spirit of the martial arts community at the time could be described either as fractured or, from another point-of-view, diversified so that everyone one had an art that satisfied his/her needs. If we could say that the martial arts gathered their chi collectively, we could say that their internal energies were many, varied, and increasingly more applicable to individual needs and preferences.

Then MMA came along in its various forms—back to sport we go, kicking the full contact aspect of karate up a notch, and adding the grappling that previously had been available only in judo. It was more holistic, as its moniker suggests, but it was still studied as a sport. The martial arts community’s chi, having been gathered as a variable whole, was in my opinion, fractured again into two camps: traditional martial arts and a rough-and-tumble sport that many people mistook for self-defense.

The MMA spirit was flashy, combative, short-term, full of braggadocio and swagger, but nevertheless effective within its sphere. The traditional martial arts spirit was more polite, controlled, even cooperative (after decades of being competitive), and long-term, but only *potentially* effective—there was still no realistic way its self-defense skills could be tested.

Mixed Martial Arts do not have to gather their chi. They can continue for quite a while on their competitive energy, their TV appearances, and their profits. The traditional martial arts, however, will not, in my opinion, get a spiritual boost from karate's acceptance as an Olympic sport. The competitive energy, TV appearances, and profits that result from Olympic exposure will further isolate traditional budo (the non-competitive self-defense/self-development-oriented martial arts), making it difficult, if not impossible, for the martial arts community to gather its chi.

What will energize traditional martial arts? What will harmonize its internal organs, release its toxins, and unlock its energy? Multiple art seminars? Videos and books on generic subjects (not on style-specific subjects)? Yep, for sure. How about making one's style or art incidental to what one teaches? How about teaching one's style or art by concentrating on *universal principles of movement* that any martial artist can appreciate? How about teaching [Master Classes](#)?