

1st World Qigong Conference



On the 9th hour of the 9th day of the 9th month the First World Qi Gong Congress was opened in

Hamburg, Germany. They chose this auspicious time and location for a special reason. In Chinese numerology the number 999 1 999 add up to the perfect number of 55, numbers which are unanimous with heaven and earth. Also on that day Hamburg was in direct alignment with heaven, human and earth – a symbol that on that particular day important events in our life may take a turn for the better.

So was it a perfect event and did life take a turn for the better?

Unfortunately, as the opening ceremony took place on a Thursday I wasn't able to attend. I did however make a trip to Hamburg to attend for the Saturday and Sunday.

Helmut Oberlack and his wife Tamara, who I had met on two occasions at the European Tai Chi and Qigong Congress Forums, in Hungary in 1997 and 1999, very kindly agreed to accommodate me during my visit to their fair city.

Helmut had attended the opening ceremony and was very impressed with a demonstration given by a visiting Qigong master from China. His demonstration of Kun Jing involved moving around the room waving his arms and making strange, intense sounds. A flower was placed some distance away and he moved it from afar. Those in attendance were greatly moved when he momentarily stopped a highly spinning electric fan from a distance. The electric points were well in view and the fan didn't slow down gradually – it just stopped!

On Saturday morning Helmut, who was teaching that weekend, supplied me with a map, careful directions and his trusty old bicycle (his shiney new one being too high for my wee legs). Armed with my high-tech roving reporter's gear (minidisk, digital camera and laptop computer) I set off at 8.45 to head for this exciting event!

The trusty old bicycle sounded somewhat creaky but, as it was many years since I had ridden a bicycle, I guessed they all felt like this. German street names don't really register with me so I had to keep stopping to ask for directions. 20 minutes from the auspicious location of Audimax the chain went. Perhaps I should have come on Thursday at 9.00am after all. I locked up the failed bicycle and continued on foot.

Finally arriving at the centre my first impression was of around six or seven people who appeared to be beating themselves with what looked like an old sock filled at the foot part with sand. Perhaps they were stimulating their meridians? Two youngish women were swaying around to some exotic music from the sound system. It didn't appear to be a traditional Qigong form so I guess it may have been 'spontaneous' Qigong.



I reported to the information desk to see what was on the programme. They indicated that there were some workshops which had already started but there would be demonstrations going on outside. I went out to look, but nothing was happening, so I decided to visit the stands selling merchandise. Qi is widely considered to be all pervasive but I really couldn't get my head round the Qi Stones (previously sold as crystals), Qi sticks or the Qi haircuts that were on offer. Qi haircuts? Yes, this intrigued me too so I felt duty bound to investigate this new phenomena. The young assistant who apologised for her poor English (don't you always feel real guilty about the efforts our fellow European's make with language when we make none!) tried her best to explain. She told me that the hairdressing master was also a highly accomplished Reiki Master. The idea was that she tuned into your Aura and 'felt' what was the right hairstyle for the individual. As I was of a certain age best suited to a number 4, I figured there really wasn't too much she could do for this individual.

One stand which did interest me was representing a woman who did Qigong classes with children. Given the usual bunch of free-range kids usually seen dragged along to these events, I felt she really had to have something special to succeed in making it sufficiently interesting to keep them away from Game Boys and Nintendo. She showed me photographs and videos of her workshops with the children and I'm trying to get her articles translated into English for a future publication.

After lunch I discovered there were some lectures happening in another building so I mosied on over. The lectures were delivered in Chinese with German translations which were subsequently translated into English. I caught the end of a tai chi talk when the speaker was referring to the concept of the dantien being something more than merely an acupoint. It was an area around the abdomen where the energy should be stored by focussing the mind downwards. Nothing new here then. The next speaker was a German woman who was talking about connections between qigong and psychotherapy. The dear translator tried her utmost to make sense of this, to no avail. She continually apologised for not only, not being able to translate to English, but to even comprehend it in German. Taking pity on her I told her that my new-found Welsh friend and I, the only people wearing the headsets, weren't really that interested.

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The Welshman, who I was previously introduced to by the organisers, said he would show me around some more. As John had attended the event with some German co-students, since the Thursday morning, he was dispatched to assist me. He introduced me to his Chinese teacher's assistant who had also travelled from China. They were from an organisation called Lotus Qigong and had a stall with nice photographs of lotuses. I tried talking to her but was distracted by the baby she was feeding with small shrimps from a tupperware bowl. After 10 minutes we were asked to leave the room we were using as it was closing.

A German Lotus Qigong student told me that they were about to start the closing ceremony and I should come as they would be performing demonstrations. The auditorium filled with around 200 eager participants. Someone told me that the Qigong Master, who had previously stopped the spinning fan, was to demonstrate. The Master climbed on stage wearing a white suit and duly thanked all concerned for organising the event. His first demonstration consisted of squeezing his substantial body into an absurdly small child's shirt. This was achieved with much inhalation and wriggling. He then changed into what could only be described as black velvet hot pants and a black velvet waistcoat. He proceeded to posture on stage, flexing his muscles and his well-fed girth. He was handed a sword by his similarly attired assistant. Oh good, a sword form! No, not to be. The dramatic music began and he proceeded to swallow the sword. After much applause he proudly presented a sword with five blades which merged into one. Again he swallowed it. Again they applauded. He repeated the stunt with a nine bladed sword. Then he produced two sharpened meat cleavers and chopped up some cucumbers. The cleavers were then turned on their sides and placed upright on the floor. He did intense meditative concentrations and stood on the sharpened blades. The lights were dimmed and he finally presented his piece de resistance. A fluorescent tube was inserted into his mouth and down into his stomach. Again they applauded. Finally he ended his show by painting calligraphy which apparently would provide the lucky recipients with healing energy. They were proudly presented to a few of the other masters and key people from the event.

Although this was the end of the closing ceremony for some inexplicable reason the event was to continue the next day.

I enjoyed a very pleasant evening spent with Helmut, Tamara, Linda Chase Broda (who by a happy

coincidence was teaching in Hamburg that weekend) and a couple of other German instructors. The next morning Helmut and I set off again in search of the secrets of the universe. We arrived at the venue at 9.00am and was told that there were seminars beginning which would each last three hours. One was dealing with the Five Emotions, one Chen Style Taijiquan and another on Gulin Qigong. As I had already done a short session of Chen Style, and didn't really see much point in only experiencing another short session, it was a choice between the Five Emotions and Gulin Qigong. As the Gulin Qigong was to be led by someone from London I plumped for the English speaker. We took the lift 12 floors up and joined the other two eager participants. After 40 minutes wait there was no sign of the teacher so we went to the Five Emotions. Understandably the participants, who were discussing their deepest emotions, weren't keen on members of the press being there and we were asked to leave. The Chen style Taiji was well underway so we finally agreed a sight-seeing tour of Hamburg would be a more pleasing option.

I must end my confirming that I am a firm believer in the goodness of Qigong. I teach it over 12 hours a week and my students have reported great benefits which continually not only validates my belief, but often surprises me in the results they claim. I believe that many others can also enjoy these benefits. To achieve this I think it is important that Qigong is presented in a clear, understandable and convincing manner. Qigong as a term is as generic as the term Music. There are a myriad of interpretations, styles and methods that operate under the heading of Qigong. Perhaps it is interesting to see some of the more outrageous demonstrations of the art but I really believe that its real strengths are to be found in its simplicity. With a few basic exercises, practiced regularly one can enjoy many benefits.

In running a Congress of any kind there are many things that need to be considered, not least the financial viability. To create a balance between a presentation of scientific facts and promoting the benefits of the art, it has to be interesting, stimulating, and sufficiently exciting to attract the paying customer. To use the term, 'World Qigong Congress' I feel it should be accessible to participants who don't speak only German or Chinese. I found it difficult to ascertain what was happening at the event. Information in English was not readily available. I missed important events if they happened at all. All I saw was a range of stalls selling questionable products and some circus skills. What I wanted, and expected to see, was sound scientific reasoning to re-affirm my faith in the art of Qigong. It is my earnest hope that, should this become a regular event, the organisers are better able to truly present the best of Qigong to a 'World' audience who I'm sure will benefit.

