

ZHAN ZHUANG



Zhan Zhuang (pronounced “Jan Jong”) is a powerful internal exercise system that was developed in China. The translation of Zhan Zhuang is “standing like a tree”. It is an art focused on the principles of deep energy growth. Previously kept a secret, this health system is now attracting considerable attention. Some of its benefits include: strengthened immunity, successful treatment of chronic illness, high levels of daily energy, and the natural regeneration of the nervous system.

Even though our bodies are filled with energy, its free flow is often blocked. Through muscular and mental tension we deprive ourselves of this precious resource and deplete our natural vitality. Zhan Zhuang is a unique exercise that reverses this process of degeneration. By using dynamic stillness, it builds up and releases an extraordinary flow of natural energy that is dormant inside of us, and thus raises the body and mind to remarkably high levels of fitness.

CALMING YOUR MIND AND BODY

The Zhan Zhuang system works on the mind in two ways: some of the exercises calm the mind; others aim to strengthen the power of the mind. You cannot accomplish the second without having achieved the first. Therefore, anyone starting Zhan Zhuang training must first work on calming the mind. Ultimately, you need to develop your mental control to the point where your mind can make your body relax precisely at the moment that your whole system is subjected to the greatest possible stress on it. This makes Zhan Zhuang one of the most personally demanding exercise systems ever developed. It requires an extraordinarily high level of synchronization between the mind and body. To begin this, direct your mind through your body, by following the instructions below.

SMILE TO RELAX

To begin the mental exercise, start at the top of your body. Once you have adopted one of the first two Zhan Zhuang positions, think of your face. Think of smiling and then feel your facial muscles relax as a gentle smile begins to form. Feel your eyes, cheek muscles, and lips lose their tension as you begin to smile.

CHECK YOUR BREATH

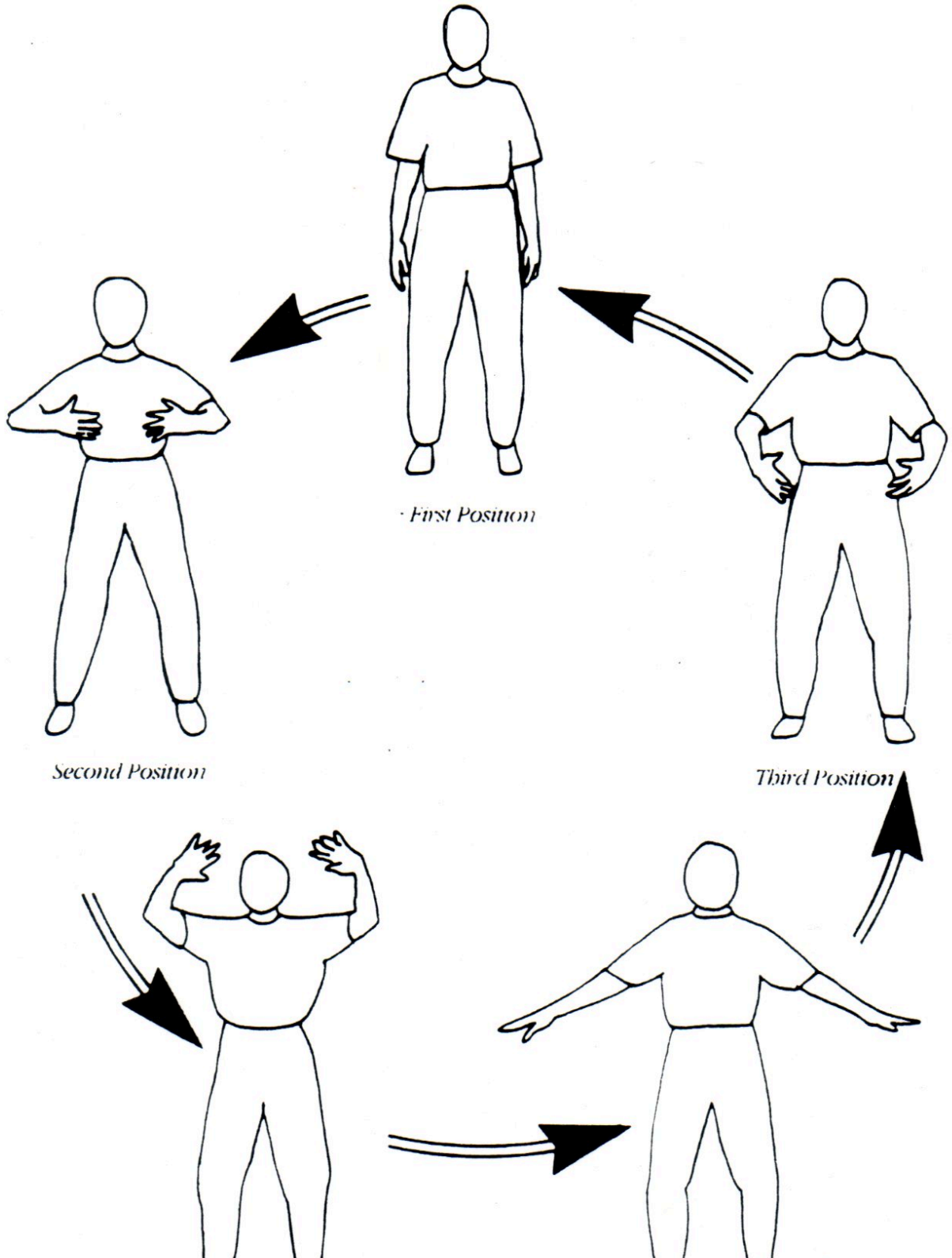
Make sure you are breathing from the Dan Tien (central point of energy, below the navel). Quietly and slowly breathe out through your nose. As you exhale, draw your belly in so that you feel you are squeezing the air out of your torso from the bottom up. Breathe out smoothly and soundlessly, until you feel you have emptied your lungs. When you are ready to breathe in, inhale through your nose and allow your belly to expand outward as if the incoming air is filling your abdomen. Allow this to happen naturally; don't force your belly out. Just let the air filter in smoothly and steadily without tension. Make sure you are paying attention to your outgoing breath only, and then allowing yourself to inhale effortlessly. Once this becomes automatic, you should ignore your breathing altogether.

RELAX YOUR BODY

SCANNING AND RELEASING

Having relaxed your face and checked your breathing use your mind to travel through your body from top to toe, relaxing every joint and sinew. Begin at the very top of your head and work down from your skull to your neck, to your right and left shoulders, to your elbows, wrists and fingers. Then continue down through your ribs and spine to your pelvic girdle and then through your thighs and knees to your ankles and toes. As your mind makes its way downward, search for tension and tell each muscle group to relax. Let the tension flow out through your hands and feet and down deep into the ground.

THE FULL CIRCLE



THE FULL CIRCLE

First Position Wu Chi

All Zhan Zhuang training begins with the Wu Chi position. Wu Chi translates as emptiness, which is the state from which the power of our primal energy can begin to emanate. By beginning with a period of quiet standing we lay the foundation for all the other positions in the practice of Zhan Zhuang.

The Wu Chi position involves simply standing still. It is an opportunity to pay careful attention to the tensions in your body. Simple as it may seem, this opening position, correctly practiced, holds the key to unlock the storehouse of your great internal energy reserves.

Moving into position, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing forward, either parallel or turned slightly outward. Let your hands hang loosely by your sides and drop your shoulders. Imagine that, like a puppet, your whole body is hanging suspended from a string at the top of your skull. A string holds your head from a point at the top of your skull, directly in line with the tips of your ears. Feel yourself sinking down, relaxing as you hang from the string.

Breathe calmly and naturally with the tip of your tongue resting on the hard palate behind your upper teeth. Unlock your knees and bend them slightly. Stand quietly and allow your whole system to calm down.

Second Position Holding the Balloon

The next step in Zhan Zhuang training is to start "Holding the Balloon". This position forms the basis for many of the more advanced exercises, and speeds the inner circulation of energy through your feet, up through your entire body, and to your hands and head.

Moving into the second position from the first position, sink down slightly. Your knees bend as you sink downward. Your head, torso and pelvic girdle remain gently aligned exactly as they were in the first position. Your spine unfolds downward and straightens naturally. Do not bend forward. Imagine you are simply resting your bottom on the edge of a high stool. Your weight rests equally on both feet.

Slowly bring both arms upward and forward to form an open circle in front of your chest at about shoulder level. Imagine that you are holding a large inflated balloon between your hands, forearms, and chest.

As you hold this position, imagine that you are resting on a series of other balloons that take your full weight. Your armpits and upper arms rest on 2 small balloons. Your thighs gently hold one balloon in place. A huge balloon takes your weight behind you, like a beach ball on the sand. The weight on your feet remains slightly forward.

Like a tree you reach upward to the sky. Like a tree you are rooted from below.

Fifth Position Holding the Balloon in Front of Your Face

The fifth position is the most taxing so far. It places much greater demands on your legs and arms and therefore requires a higher level of endurance.

To begin, sink down as deeply as you can manage-eight inches or more; being careful not to extend your knees over your toes. Bend as if you were sitting down. Your weight shifts a little toward your heels.

Raise your arms and turn your hands outward so that the backs of your hands are level with your cheeks. Your open hands hold an imaginary, inflated balloon in front of your face. Press gently outward on the balloon as if to push it away from you, but do not tense your muscles. You should imagine that you are guiding the balloon away from you. Your fingers are roughly at eye level. They are never higher than your head. A second imaginary balloon rests on the arc formed by your upper arms, forearm, and the back of your wrists. Imagine that your wrists are supported by a strap that runs around the back of your neck.

Keep three key points in line: the crown of the head, the Dan Tien and the midpoint of your feet.

The fifth position greatly increases the flow of energy in your body. You become like a bow the moment before it releases the arrow. The effect is the result of pressure on your chi circulation generated by the muscles in your legs-an effect you can feel while holding the posture and after you rise up to come out of it.

Fourth Position Standing in the Stream

Imagine you are standing in a stream with the current flowing toward you. Bend your knees and sink down about four inches. Now reach your hands out to either side at waist height.

Imagine you are suspended from the top of your skull and that your wrists are supported by an invisible strap that runs from the back of your neck.

Your palms and outstretched fingers rest parallel to the surface of the running stream. Imagine you are holding two balls, keeping them steady in the flowing water. Concentrate on holding the balls steady as they try to float away with the current of the running water. Imagine that all of your weight is sinking down to the soles of your feet.

Third Position Holding Your Belly (Dan Tien)

This position, in which your arms form a large, expansive downward curve, creates a restful transition from Holding the Balloon. It is a powerful exercise in itself that helps gather the increased flow of energy in your body and focus it on the central energy point below your navel (the Dan Tien).

In the Holding Your Belly position your head remains suspended from the crown point. Your entire weight flows down from this point. Keep your neck, torso and pelvic girdle in the same relaxed posture as in the first position.

Slowly bring your forearms around in front of your abdomen. Raise and open your hands slightly and bring them to rest as if they were holding a large inflated balloon between your hands and your belly. Use the imaginary balloons that you used in the second position to aid you in this position. The balloons give you support and help reduce the tension in your muscles.

First Position Wu Chi

As you complete the full circle, return to the first position Wu Chi.