

# The Six Harmonies in Standing Meditation Practice: A Comprehensive Guide

By Teja Fudo Myoo

## Introduction: The Foundation of Internal Arts

Standing meditation (**Zhan Zhuang** 站桩) is a profound yet accessible practice within QigongDharma, cultivating internal strength, awareness, and harmony. At its core, it is not merely a physical discipline but a sophisticated method for deepening embodied presence, refining the relationship between stillness and movement, and creating harmony between internal states and external structures.

The Six Harmonies framework are the **Internal Harmonies** (Xin-Yi, Yi-Qi, Qi-Li) and **External Harmonies** (Shoulders-Hips, Elbows-Knees, Hands-Feet), guides practitioners toward a dynamic balance between inner and outer forces. By integrating these harmonies, practitioners can transform their practice from a mere posture into a state of dynamic harmony, where inside and outside, stillness and movement, form and emptiness dance together in perfect balance.

These are some of the qualities developed by Standing Meditation:

- **Deepening** embodied presence
- **Cultivating** energetic coherence
- **Refining** the relationship between stillness and movement
- **Establishing harmony** between internal states and external structure
- **Developing awareness** that permeates everyday activities

This practice invites us to recognize that true integration unfolds through a process of patient development rather than forceful imposition. The developmental journey takes a nonlinear path, moving through phases of insight, refinement, and occasional plateaus. Understanding this encourages practitioners to trust the process instead of becoming discouraged by perceived obstacles or periods of apparent stagnation.

## The Wisdom of "Under-Doing": The 70/30 Principle Finding the Optimal Balance

One of the fundamental principles in standing meditation and QigongDharma internal arts training is the concept of "Under-Doing"—operating at about 70% of your capacity instead of pushing to extremes. This principle ensures that awareness stays present, tension stays minimal, and continual refinement remains possible.

### Why the 70/30 guideline works:

- **Sustainable effort:** Prevents burnout and injury that often result from over-exertion
- **Awareness cultivation:** Leaves mental space for observation and adjustment
- **Tension release:** Allows for the identification and release of unnecessary holding patterns
- **Subtle perception:** Creates conditions for sensing finer energetic movements
- **Systemic integration:** Provides room for the nervous system to integrate changes

Many practitioners make the mistake of equating intensity with effectiveness. In standing practice, the opposite is often true—less effort frequently yields greater results. By modulating our effort to this "sweet spot" of approximately 70%, we create optimal conditions for transformation.

## The Costs of Over-Efforting

When we push beyond the 70% threshold, several counterproductive patterns typically emerge:

- Excessive muscle tension that blocks energy flow
- Shallow, restricted breathing
- Narrowed awareness focused only on enduring discomfort
- Reinforcement of existing holding patterns rather than their release
- Mental resistance and aversion that undermines the meditative quality

By contrast, under-doing cultivates depth, sensitivity, and refinement. This principle applies equally to motion and stillness—in dynamic practices like Daoyin, Liu He Ba Fa, Taiji, and Xing Yi, as well as in stillness practices like Zhan Zhuang or seated Qigong.

## The Pareto Principle Applied to Internal Arts

Another useful framework for understanding this approach is the **Pareto Principle** (80/20 rule), which suggests that 80% of outcomes arise from 20% of causes. In standing meditation, this means:

- Small, subtle adjustments in posture, breath, and energetic awareness produce disproportionately powerful results
- A few fundamental refinements impact the entire system—body, mind, and Qi
- Accomplishment does not come from accumulating more techniques but from deepening understanding of core principles

Instead of forcing effort, we find that small, skillful refinements uncover the true depth that is possible in practice. This is why the precision and quality of attention are more important than duration or intensity.

## The Six Harmonies: A Framework for Integrating Origin and Significance

The Six Harmonies (Liu He, 六和) represent a sophisticated framework for understanding integration in internal arts. The balance between internal and external aspects cultivates a dynamic accord between them. Originally codified in martial traditions like Xing Yi Quan, Liu He Ba Fa (Six Harmonies, Eight Methods), and certain Taiji lineages, these principles have profound applications in standing meditation practices such as **San Ti Shi** (Three Treasures Stance) and **Wuji Standing**.

The term "harmony" (He, 和) here refers not to a static state but to a dynamic, responsive relationship between different aspects of our being. These harmonies describe the coordination of movement, energy, and awareness, allowing for a state of fluid balance between inner and outer forces.

They are traditionally divided into two interconnected groups:

1. **Three Internal Harmonies** (內三和, Nei San He) – governing the integration of mind, intention, and Qi
2. **Three External Harmonies** (外三和, Wai San He) – governing the coordination of body structures in movement and stillness

It's important to understand that these harmonies are cultivated simultaneously rather than one after the other. Through focused yet relaxed practice, they arise as a natural synergy within the body-mind system.

## The Three Internal Harmonies (內三和, Nei San He)

The internal harmonies govern the relationship between the heart-mind intention and energy flow. They represent the "invisible" aspects of practice that bring the physical form to life.

### 1. Xin (心) Harmonizes with Yi (意) – Heart-Mind and Intention

**Xin (心)** refers to the heart-mind—our emotional presence, spirit, and consciousness. In traditional Chinese philosophy, the heart (rather than the brain) was regarded as the seat of both emotion and cognition. Xin represents our broader awareness and emotional state.

**Yi (意)** refers to focused intention, directed awareness, and clarity of purpose. Yi is more specific than Xin; it's the focused attention we apply to a particular aspect of practice.

#### When in harmony:

- Mental and emotional states become unified rather than fragmented
- Emotional presence leads to unified mental states and clearer awareness
- Awareness becomes clear, calm, and directed rather than scattered or reactive
- Actions emerge from a centered place rather than from habit or impulse
- Meditation deepens naturally as the mind settles into present-moment awareness

#### Practice guidance:

- Begin by simply noticing the quality of your mental-emotional state (xin) – this is mindfulness
- Gently direct your focused awareness (yi) to specific aspects of your posture or breath
- When the mind wanders, patiently return yi to the present moment experience
- Notice how emotional states affect your posture, and how postural adjustments affect your emotions

## 2. Yi (意) Harmonizes with Qi (氣) – Intention and Vital Energy

**Yi (意)**, as described above, is focused intention or directed awareness.

**Qi (氣)** is the vital energy or life force that animates all living things. In practice, qi manifests as sensations of warmth, tingling, fullness, or flow.

### When in harmony:

- Energy follows attention naturally and without strain
- Energy flow is positively influenced, enhancing both movement and stillness
- The classical principle "Yi dao, qi dao" (意到,氣到)—"Where the mind goes, energy follows"—becomes experientially real
- Movement and stillness become more efficient, integrating muscular effort
- Blockages in energy flow begin to dissolve through awareness rather than force

### Practice guidance:

- Direct your attention (yi) to different parts of your body while standing
- Notice any sensations (manifestations of qi) that arise where you place your attention
- Experiment with "thinking into" areas that feel blocked or numb
- Allow time for subtle sensations to emerge rather than expecting immediate dramatic experiences

## 3. Qi (氣) Harmonizes with Li (力) – Vital Energy and Physical Force

**Note:** While some traditions identify the third internal harmony as Qi-Shen (energy-spirit) or Qi-Li (energy-principle/natural law), in practical standing meditation, the relationship between energy (qi) and physical force/strength (li, 力) is particularly relevant.

**Qi (氣)**, as described above, is vital energy.

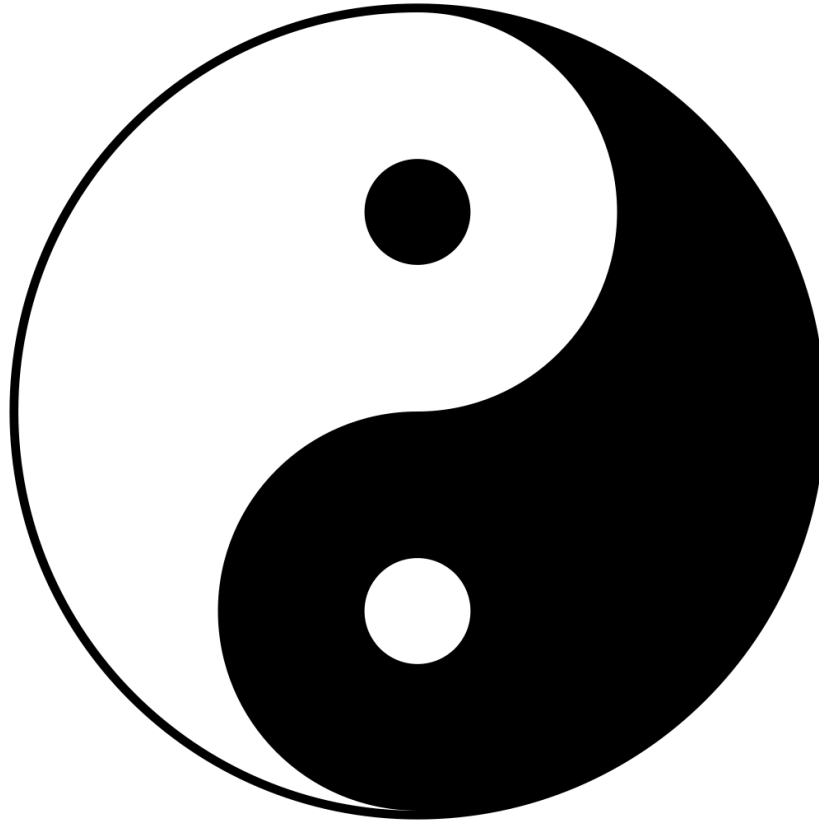
**Li (力)** refers to physical force, strength, or power. In advanced practice, li transforms from brute muscular force to something more refined—what is sometimes called "intelligent force" or "energetic strength."

**When in harmony:**

- Physical movements become infused with energetic quality rather than mere mechanical action
- Less muscular effort produces a greater effect
- The body responds to challenges with appropriate force—neither too much nor too little
- A sense of powerful ease emerges, replacing strain and tension

**Practice guidance:**

- Notice areas where you're using unnecessary muscular force in your standing posture
- Explore how minimal adjustments can maintain structural integrity while reducing effort
- Feel the distinction between structural support (skeletal alignment) and muscular tension
- Experiment with "energetic support" rather than muscular holding



## The Three External Harmonies (外三和, Wai San He)

The external harmonies regulate the coordination of body structures, forming a unified whole instead of isolated parts. They define specific relationships between major joint systems that, when correctly aligned, permit optimal energy flow and structural integrity.

### 1. Shoulders Harmonize with Hips (肩與胯相合) – Upper and Lower Body Connection

This harmony creates the foundation for whole-body integration by establishing proper relationship between the upper and lower body.

#### When in harmony:

- The upper and lower body move as a coordinated unit rather than in isolation
- Forces generated from the lower body (ground) can transfer efficiently through the torso
- Rotation and counter-rotation between hips and shoulders occur in a balanced relationship
- The spine can function as a dynamic bridge between the upper and lower extremities

#### Practice guidance:

- Feel how slight movements of the hips affect the shoulder position and vice versa
- Notice tendencies to disconnect upper from lower body (common in many daily activities)
- Explore gentle rotational movements that coordinate shoulders and hips
- In standing practice, regularly check that shoulders are not rising toward the ears while hips remain grounded



## 2. Elbows Harmonize with Knees (肘與膝相合) – Mid-Joint Coordination

This harmony establishes a proper relationship between the mid-joints of the arms and legs, creating structural pathways for energy flow and force transmission.

### When in harmony:

- Arms and legs work together as coherent units rather than disconnected parts
- Weight shifts and directional changes occur smoothly and efficiently
- Protective reflexes and responses become more coordinated
- Power can be both generated and absorbed through these interconnected pathways.

### Practice guidance:

- Notice the natural correspondence between elbow and knee positions in your stance
- Feel how adjusting elbow position affects the corresponding knee's stability and vice versa
- Explore how bent knees and elbows create "storage space" for potential energy
- Maintain appropriate flexion in these joints, avoiding both rigidity and collapse

### 3. Hands Harmonize with Feet (手與足相合) – Extremity Coordination

This harmony connects the body's outermost contact points with the environment, establishing a coherent relationship between grounding and expression.

#### When in harmony:

- Root (feet) and reach (hands) become functionally connected
- Energy can flow in complete circuits through the body
- Balance becomes more dynamic and responsive
- Movements gain precision and intentionality

#### Practice guidance:

- Feel the subtle connection between hand movements and the corresponding pressure shifts in your feet
- Notice how hand positions affect your overall balance and stance
- Explore how energy seems to flow between hands and feet in different positions
- Maintain awareness of both ground contact and hand position simultaneously

### Integrating the Six Harmonies in Practice

#### Progressive Development

While we cultivate all six harmonies simultaneously, their manifestation typically follows a developmental sequence:

1. **Awareness** – Simply noticing where harmonies are present or absent in your practice
2. **Deliberate cultivation** – Consciously adjusting to establish better coordination
3. **Natural integration** – Harmonies emerge spontaneously without conscious effort
4. **Refinement** – Subtle adjustments enhance and deepen the harmonious relationships
5. **Embodiment** – Harmonies become your natural way of being, even outside formal practice

## Practical Application in Standing Meditation

Here is a simple protocol for exploring the Six Harmonies in your standing practice:

1. **Begin with structure** – Establish your basic standing posture with attention to alignment
2. **Scan for tension** – Notice areas of unnecessary holding or collapse
3. **Apply the 70/30 principle** – Adjust effort to the optimal level
4. **Check external harmonies** – Make subtle adjustments to shoulder/hip, elbow/knee, and hand/foot relationships
5. **Cultivate internal harmonies** – Bring heart-mind (xin) and intention (yi) into alignment, direct yi to influence qi, and allow qi to transform into appropriate li
6. **Allow integration** – After making adjustments, allow time for the system to integrate changes
7. **Cycle awareness** – Continue to cycle attention through the harmonies, making subtle refinements
8. **Release cycling awareness** – Once alignment is well established, let go of mental effort and the application of mental awareness and let go into the **presence of being**. From time to time, you may naturally come back to the application of awareness in your practice. Remember: the application of awareness is fundamentally different from your poise in mindful presence.

Standing Meditation is not a mechanical checklist but a living exploration. The harmonies are not separate entities but aspects of a unified whole.

## Common Challenges and Solutions

**Challenge:** Forcing alignment or trying too hard to "get it right"

**Solution:** Return to the principle of under-doing; allow posture to emerge rather than imposing it

**Challenge:** Becoming frustrated when harmonies seem elusive

**Solution:** Recognize that development is non-linear; plateaus are normal and necessary phases

**Challenge:** Focusing exclusively on external form while neglecting internal aspects

**Solution:** Balance attention between structural alignment and energetic/awareness qualities

**Challenge:** Difficulty sensing subtle energy (qi) movements

**Solution:** Begin with more tangible sensations like warmth, pressure, or tingling; refinement of perception develops with practice

## Beyond Standing: The Six Harmonies in Daily Life

The cultivation of the Six Harmonies extends far beyond formal practice sessions. As these principles become embodied, they naturally infuse everyday activities:

- **Walking** becomes an expression of coordinated harmony between upper and lower body
- **Physical work** becomes more efficient as appropriate force (li) replaces unnecessary effort
- **Communication** gains clarity as heart-mind (xin) and intention (yi) come into alignment
- **Decision-making** improves as internal harmony creates clearer perception
- **Relationships** benefit from the balanced give-and-take reflected in the harmonious opposites

Consider the Six Harmonies not merely as technical principles but as a philosophy of embodied living—a way to bring greater coherence, effectiveness, and ease to all dimensions of experience.

## Harmony with the Dao

The Six Harmonies ultimately point toward a profound truth at the heart of all internal arts: genuine accomplishment emerges not from accumulating techniques but from aligning with natural principles. As the Dao De Jing reminds us, “Humanity follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is natural.”

By cultivating these harmonies with dedication and ease, we foster a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things—within ourselves, in nature, and throughout the universe. Our practice slowly evolves from a series of exercises into a vibrant expression of natural principles.

When the Six Harmonies are fully alive within us, standing transforms from a mere posture into a state of dynamic harmony, where the inside and outside, stillness and movement, form and emptiness dance together in perfect balance. This is not just a technique; it is the embodiment of Dao itself.

May your practice of the Six Harmonies bring greater peace, vitality, and wisdom into your life, and may that harmony extend outward to benefit all beings.

---