

Zhan Zhuang

By [Victoria Windholtz](#)

Zhan Zhuang (standing like a tree, or hugging a tree). In Chinese, “Zhan” means to stand still and “Zhuang” means foundation or pile. Zhan Zhuang is an ancient training technique that lies between meditation, martial arts and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

This posture, traditionally practiced and transmitted secretly in martial arts circles, has been openly shown to the public since the beginning of the 20th century. Wang Xiang Zhai, a very famous martial arts master, and creator of Yiquan (Mind boxing) was known to say “Immobility is the mother of any technique”.

Today, many internal arts practitioners, including those who study tai chi, Xing-yi, Bagua and Qigong, study this technique. Its applications are many. It is a core practice for both beginning and advanced students, being a key exercise to continuously nurture and develop their level of practice.

Zhan Zhuang's ultimate goal is to achieve the unity of the human being, enabling a perfect balance between the earth and the sky universal forces.

Traditional Chinese Medicine asserts that when one part of the body is ill, the global energy of our body also loses balance. Everything is related, the body, mind and emotions. A complete energetic discipline like the Zhan Zhuang allows us to dissolve blockages and progress towards a better physical and moral shape. Our state of internal fitness is clearly visible from the outside. We become more alert, full of vigor and perfectly available for the chores of our everyday lives. This technique is also a form of meditation. By keeping our consciousness in our ‘Dantien’ (an area located three finger’s width below the navel) and by relaxing our tensions, a state of inner peace and tempered happiness appear. It is an indescribable state and its effects have a positive influence on our lives.

Our body position has a direct influence on our emotional state. Zhan Zhuang practice helps us to “unlearn” postural bad habits and to return to a more natural, comfortable and healthy posture. Though time and with regular practice we can gradually apply the structural principles of Zhan Zhuang to all aspects of our lives and physical tasks; waiting for the bus, washing dishes, sitting, lying down, cooking, driving... any situation becomes a laboratory of experimentation, a way to improve our practice. Progressively, you will go on to hold a better position when you are sitting in front of your computer or watching television. As a result, a general state of wellbeing, physical comfort and tranquility will pervade all your daily activities.

Principles of practice

Find a quiet place for your daily practice. Avoid extreme climatic conditions when practicing outdoors and when indoors, choose a fresh, well-ventilated room.

If your energy level is very low (exhaustion, depressive state, physical pains...), use some gentle music to start your exercises in a positive and pleasant way.

Ideally, Zhan Zhuang should be practiced a little every day. Training three or four times a week can bring good results. In any case, it is better to exercise a little regularly every day rather than isolated, exhausting sessions from time to time.

When you start practicing Zhan Zhuang two aspects are important:

Relax your entire body.

Fix your posture.

Keep focused on these principles without trying to apply them too seriously. It is normal to have some incoming thoughts, which “pollute” your practice. Do not try either to control or to stop them. Instead, notice them coming and going as you would watch clouds passing by through the sky.

Focus on your bodily sensations of tranquility and comfort during practice. Let your practice become your rest.

By focusing our attention on our bodies, we progressively learn how to remain alert and quiet at the same time. It is not, like in many sports, about making a dynamic effort then rest. Here effort and relaxation go together in an outside static but inside very dynamic exercise. At the same time, as long as you further develop your sensitivity you will become aware of all the blockages and changes that are taking place inside your body.

In this posture, the mind and body work together as a whole. The guidelines are simple, yet the details are numerous and some of them need to be settled down progressively. Enjoy the process.

Look for quality instead of quantity. Ten minutes of serious practice is more valuable than two hours of empty Zhan Zhuang.

Follow the instructions carefully. The inner trip is about to start...

a) Stand with your feet in a parallel position.

b) Hold your arms up as if you are holding a ball, placing your hands somewhere between your thorax and abdomen. If you just beginning or feel tired then hold your hands at the level of your “Dantien” or abdomen. With time and practice, you will feel the more able and inclined to raise them higher. Let it happen naturally, without force. Remain natural.

c) Keep your head up. You should have the feeling as if your head is suspended from above.

d) Relax your shoulders, elbows, wrists and hands.

e) Relax your chest and allow your breath to settle down smoothly into the ‘Dantien’. (It is very important for beginners not to deliberately try to push down the breathing. This can be harmful for the internal organs. In fact, we cannot force the abdominal breathing. It will come naturally with consistent practice.)

f) Relax your “Kwa” (hips).

g) Bend your knees, slightly relaxing them. Do not let the body weight rest on them. Do not practice a low posture if you are a beginner or if you are physically exhausted.

h) Relax your ankles.

i) Relax your feet.

j) Make sure that your body weight is equally balanced between both feet.

k) Relax and stretch your spine.

l) Relax your back.

m) Align your “Baihui” point, which is located on the top of your head, in the center and your “Huiyin” point, located between the rectum and the perineum.

n) “Listen to a soft rain behind your back”. Through the Zhan Zhuang practice, you will become aware of the eight subsidiary directions (front, back, left, right, front right, front left, back right, back left). Keeping your attention exclusively to the front part of your body will bring part of your energy up. As a result, you will find it difficult to remain quiet and focused. Therefore, it is advisable to keep a “listening feeling” behind your back in order to achieve quietness and to enhance the development of vital energy inside your Dantien.

o) For some students, particularly beginners, closing the eyes during practice can be a source of tension or unbalance. If so, open your eyes from time to time, or keep them open all the time. Just avoid looking around too much. One of the advantages of keeping the eyes closed is to improve focus and to induce tranquility.

In order to finish a session of Zhan Zhuang, slowly let your arms back to hanging on either side of your body. Take your time to finish this exercise.

You should then place both hands, one on top of another, to cover your Dantien. When you start moving, take your time to relax your shoulders, elbows and hands again. Make sure that your Dantien is fully relaxed. Do not rush.

Zhan Zhuang is a step-by-step process, and there are no shortcuts for this practice. Persistency and patience are the keys. Of course, good teaching methods are also very important.

A way towards Freedom. This beautiful practice is also a source of spiritual inspiration, a way.

Zhan Zhuang is a style within no style, a unique technique of knowledge and personal development, and its simplicity and profoundness are a way towards the true freedom.