Tao: Philosophy for the Body
Based on a philosophical tradition dating from 5000 B.C., Qi Gong and Tai Chi are just as modern today – even in the air.

The art of Qi Gong, an ancient Chinese tradition of healing body exercises, probably developed about 5000 B.C. Many of these exercises are closely related to Indian yoga, and it is believed that they were brought to China by itinerant monks from the Himalaya region.

Later, during the Tao period, the old health exercises assumed their present character. The activities developed from the ancient forms into a series of specialized exercises to aid healing and meditation, as well as a martial art, Tai Chi. The original exercises (see the pictures above) are still central to Qi Gong – and are the simplest to practice. Some old family traditions continue to concentrate on sedentary exercises, but the most effective ones are those performed while standing, leaning slightly into the knee while maintaining the pelvis in an upright position. The continual swaying movements of Qi Gong and the more demanding Tai Chi should be understood as the physical realization of the fundamental principles of Tao philosophy. The gentle movements of Tai Chi, for example, which are retained even in combat, are a direct translation of Lao-tzu’s phrase, “The soft will vanquish the hard” (Dao te King).

Qi Gong in the Air
The isometric exercises demonstrated in Swissair’s video screened on long-haul flights particularly suit the relatively restricted space in an aircraft. These exercises are based on European models, and are ideal for beginners: Swissair’s exercises are inconspicuous because you hardly need to move while performing them. If you have overcome your inhibitions, there is of course nothing to stop you from performing your exercises in the aisle. Those who are brave enough to do their exercises standing will naturally achieve far more effective results in a shorter time – for example, in preventing fatigue and jet-lag – than those who shyly remain seated.

Masters and Charlatans
The range of courses in the Asian martial arts, exercises and traditional Chinese medicine is bewildering. There are several workshops available, but few attain the standard of masters such as Dr. Peng Wu-zhi from Taipan, who advises the Goju Kan School in Berne. The Magglingen Federal Sports School recently took the step of establishing a set of standards; the founder of Goju Kan, Erik Golowin, has drawn up a set of officially recognized regulations for Qi Gong and Tai Chi training in Switzerland. 

Relaxation: Book Tips
Whether you are a novice or an aficionado in Qi Gong and Tai Chi, the following publications will surely be enlightening.

1 Mantak Chia: Tao Yoga
Master Mantak Chia’s numerous publications, which are available worldwide, make even advanced exercises accessible to the inexperienced. It is important to note that Qi Gong exercises can disturb as well as balance the body’s energy sources, so it is advisable to start with Volume 1!

2 Peter Keider: The Five "Tibetans,"
Brief publications that deal with one particular series of exercises and explain their historical background are especially useful. The wide range of material available on the five "Tibetans" is really worth the read.

3 Liā Dsi, das Buch vom quellenden Urgrund,
Diederichs, Düsseldorf 1974
While Lao-tzu’s fundamental work, the Dao te King, frequently only speaks in veiled terms, the Liā Dsi offers detailed explanation of the teachings of this early Taoist philosopher. This is a wonderful introduction for all those who wish to discover Qi Gong or Tai Chi as a philosophical experience for body and soul.

4 Koichi Tohei, Ki im täglichen Leben, Kristkeitz, Berlin 1980
Qi Gong and Tai Chi are essential to learning how to understand one’s own energies (Ki, Chi). Koichi Tohei’s little book is still the best introduction to the philosophy of human energy.

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