

## HERBS FOR LONGEVITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TEACHINGS OF MASTER LI CHING YUEN

By John Voigt



Li Ching Yuen or Li Ching Yun (traditional Chinese: 李清雲; (b. May 1677 or after—d. May 5, 1933). Photograph taken during the spring of 1927.

Fact or Fiction?—History or Myth? Can someone live for more than two and a half centuries? What is certain is the existence of reports about Li Ching Yuen and his methods for a long and healthy life. From the May 6th, 1933 *New York Times*:

### LI CHING-YUN DEAD; GAVE HIS AGE AS 197

*"Keep a Quiet Heart, Sit Like a Tortoise, Sleep Like a Dog," His Advice for a Long Life.*

*Inquiry Put Age At 256. Reported to have buried 23 wives and had 180 descendents—sold herbs for first 100 years.*

*Peiping, May 5—Li Ching-Yun, a resident of Kaihsien, in the Province of Szechwan, who contended that he was one of the world's oldest men and said he was born in 1736—which would make him 197 years old—died today.*

Compared with estimates of Li Ching-yun's age in previous reports from China the above dispatch is conservative. In 1930 it was said Professor Wu Chung-chien, dean of the department of Education in Minkuo University, had found records showing Li was born in 1677 and that Imperial Chinese Government congratulated him on his 150th and 200th birthdays.

### BIOGRAPHY

Li Ching Yuen is reported to have been born in 1677, but presently there are no existing birth records. When he was eleven years old, three herbalists visited his village in Sichuan (Szechwan) Province with strange and exotic tales. The fascinated Li joined them to learn the art of medicinal herbs. They journeyed in the wild and sparsely inhabited mountains and forests of China, as well as Manchuria, Tibet, and in what is now northern Vietnam, and Thailand. Physical prowess was mandatory since in their travels they could encounter avalanches, mudslides, bandits, wild animals, poisonous snakes (and heaven knows what else).

During 1748, when he was seventy-one years old, he moved to Kai Hsien to join the Chinese army as a martial arts teacher and tactical advisor. He then returned to being an herbalist who occasionally taught medicinal herbology, Taoist meditative techniques, and Qigong.

A basic principle of Master Li was to lead a calm life. He wisely believed that worldly success and fame could lead to an early death—especially in

the chaotic political times in which he lived. He did his best to avoid public attention; but that came to an end when General Yang Sen, the most powerful man in in Sichuan, sought him out to learn the secrets of youthfulness, strength and sexual prowess.

General Yang Sen later described Master Li as being seven feet tall, dressed in blue robes, a pair of thick black cloth socks, and straw sandals "He can walk very quickly in the mountains, even though he's almost 250 years old. His complexion is ruddy, but he is completely bald. His fingernails are very long. In one meal he eats three bowls of rice, chicken, and another kind of meat."

During this time, 1928 from 1933, news of Li Ching Yuen began to appear in newspapers in China, and the western world. General Yang's leader and friend Chang Kai-shek, now the Generalissimo of all Chinese forces and Chairman of the National Chinese Government became interested and requested a meeting with Master Li. This was never to take place for on May 5th, 1933 Li Ching Yuen was reported to have died after attending a banquet in his honor. One story claims that he told friends, "I have done all I have to do in this world. I will now go home," and then sat back with a smile and simply died without one sign of stress.

### Li Ching Yuen's Primary Herbs for Vitality, Health and Longevity—(Li's Herbal Fountain of Youth: the simplified Rx).

The judicious use of herbs singularly and in combination is one method

**A conversation with a wise person is worth ten years of study with books**

(Chinese: 与君一席谈胜读十年书;

Pinyin: Yù jūn yī xí tán shèng dú shí nián shū.

to regulate, correct and enhance the flow of qi—Life Energy. Since each person is different, each should have an individual prescription from a master of Chinese traditional herbal medicine. Li Ching Yuen was such a master, and so taught (or was attributed to teach) the following only as useful basic principles.

### Wolfberry

A tiny dried fruit looking something like a red raisin and tasting a bit like a dried cranberry with an added hint of sweet tomato.

*Once, at the age of fifty when Li Ch'ing Yuen was collecting herbs, he met another herbalist who would walk much more quickly than he. Of course, Li Ch'ing Yuen wanted to know how this man could move so fast. The herbalist told him that every day he ate one-third ounce of lycium [gouqizi]. Li Ch'ing Yuen began doing the same, and he became much more vigorous. [Dharmananda from Yang Sen's biography]*

"Wolfberry" is an English word. The Chinese word is *gouqizi* (枸杞子). Chinese herb stores usually sell it as "Lychii Berry—Gou Qi Zi." *Fructus Lycii* is Latin and used for pharmacological reference. In the 21st century the health food industry began intense marketing for the "Goji Berry" which is an anglicization of its Chinese name.

(There now exists thousands of web sites about Li Ching Yuen and Goji Berries. Expect to find some facts, but many more fancies such as: "He lived primarily on Goji Berry tea for the last 70 years of his life.")

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) *Gouqizi* is believed to enhance the immune system, protect the liver, lungs, and kidneys, improve blood circulation, and boost sperm production as well as enrich Yin (dark, moist, feminine) energy. It may be eaten raw, or cooked in any number of ways.

*Master Li told General Yang*

*that sometimes, while he was in the mountains collecting herbs, his provisions would run out. He would survive by eating herbs, especially ginseng, Polygonum Multiflorum [ho-shou-wu], and Polygonatum giganteum, var. [Da Liu, Taoist Health, 51.]*

*("Polygonatum giganteum, var." is a rare term; more often this is called Polygonatum sibiricum. In Chinese it is Huang Jing. It invigorates the Qi and tones the spleen, lung, and kidney and their connecting energy meridians.)*

### Ginseng

*[Li Ching Yuen] "chewed on stem, one-third of an ounce (about one finger long) of fresh Ginseng a day." [Shaolin, Fall 2006]*

There are many varieties of ginseng but Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) centers on the use of Asian ginseng, also called *Panax ginseng*, or in Chinese, *Ren Shen*. (American ginseng is also a basic TCM healing agent. What is called "Russian Ginseng" is not really ginseng.) Ginseng tones and boosts, vital Qi energy, and thereby increases physical endurance and resistance to environmental hardships—qualities definitely needed by Li Ching Yuen. It is an aid in the prevention of disease and bodily degeneration. A traditional way to consume it is to cut a root into thin slices and chew on a piece a few times daily. As always it is best to consult a qualified practitioner for advice on how much to use and for how long. Ginseng should not be taken, without such consultation especially if you have high blood pressure or diabetes, or are pregnant or breast-feeding; or if you are taking any prescription medicines.

**He Shou Wu** (also called *Ho Shou Wu*)—*Polygonum Multiflorum* (Chinese: 何首乌). Pharmaceutical name: *Radix Polygoni Multiflori*. Latin botanical name: *Polygonum multiflorum* Thunb.

(Sometimes called "Fo-Ti" which is not a Chinese word, but a name created for the American Alternative Health Industry.) The Chinese patent medicine *Shou Wu Chih* has *Polygonum multiflorum* as a primary ingredient, as well as Li's other basic herb *Polygonatum sibiricum*.

*From the legend: There once was a man named Ho who at 58 was physically weak and impotent. He saw a vine whose branches were intertwined in a sexual-like embrace. He dug out its potato-like root, cooked and ate it. Immediately he felt a new vitality. His hair turned from gray to black, his vision improved, and he became more youthful. He soon married, had three sons, and lived to be 160 years old. [Dharmananda]*

*Ho Shou Wu* literally means: Ho's hair is black (shou=head; wu=black). It used as a blood and vital essence toner; also as a liver and kidney tonic. Perhaps its vast popularity is due to its purported qualities as aphrodisiac and hair grower—both preoccupations of many older men.

Ginseng, Wolfberry, and *Polygonum Multiflorum* are popular. Besides being found as *Ren Shen*, *Gou Qi Zi*, and in the patent medicine *Shou Wu Chih* in Chinese herbal shops, they usually are available in most American Chinese supermarkets. (Each morning, I, the author, take a large pinch of wolfberries, wash them in cold water (important to do), boil them for ten minutes, let them cool for five minutes, and then add a good splash of the patent medicine, *Shou Wu Chih*—which is 25% *Polygonum multiflorum*, and 20% *Polygonatum sibiricum*—both, as already mentioned, Li Ching Yuen recommendations. It seems to invigorate my Qi, and it tastes good.)

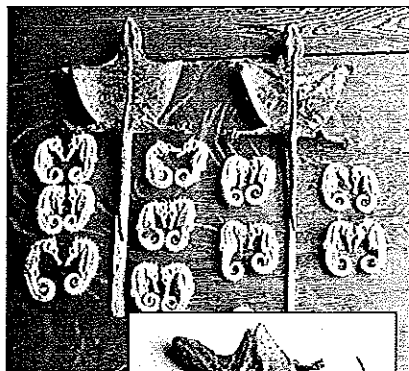
There are many unsubstantiated claims about certain herbs and Li Ching Yuen. Observe caution and question anything you may read—especially on commercial web sites.

**SPRING WINE**

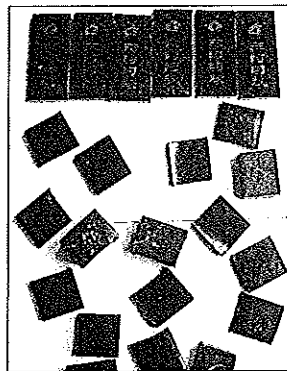
(based on Li Ching Yuen's instructions to General Yang Sen)

GRAMS	CHINESE NAME	PINYIN	ENGLISH - LATIN NAME
25	鹿茸	Lu Rong	Velvet of Deer Antler - Cornu Parvum Cerv Pantotrichum
25	鹿角胶	Lu Jiao Jiao	Deer Horn Glue - Gelatinum Cornu Cervi
25	阿胶	E Jiao	Donkey Hide Glue - Gelatinum Corii Asini
10	当归	Dang Gui	Chinese Angelica Root- Radix Angelicae Sinensis
25	熟地黄	Shu Di Huang	(Wine Steamed )Chinese Foxglove Root, - Rehmannia glutinosa
12	黄芪	Huang Qi.	Astragalus root - Radix Astragali Membranacei
4	人参	Ren Shen.	Ginseng Root - Panax ginseng.
10	女真子	Nu Zhen Zi	Privet Fruit - Fructus Ligustrī Lucid [or] Ligustrum japonicum
4	覆盆子	Fu Pen Zi	Chinese Raspberry - Rubus coreanus
10	枸杞子	Gou Qi Zi	Chinese Wolfberry Fruit [also] Matrimony Fruit - Lycium chinese [or] Fructus Lycii Chinensis
10	人胎盘	Tai Pan	Human Placenta Important: there is a possibility of human placenta being a potential disease vector (an agent that carries or transmits a disease).
10	海马	Hai Ma	Sea Horse - Hippocampus kelloggi
10	锁阳	Suo Yang	Fleshy Stem of Cynomorium- Cynomorium songaricum
1	蛤蚧	Ge Jie	one whole piece of gecko lizard - Gecko Gekko.

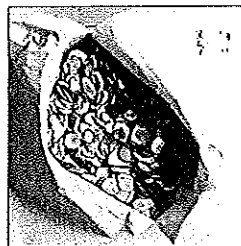
The ingredients should soak in strong alcohol, (a fifth of brandy or vodka is good) for six months, and preferably a year, before use. Dosage is a small drink before bedtime; a little more in winter, a little less in summer. An option is to sweeten it with sugar or honey.



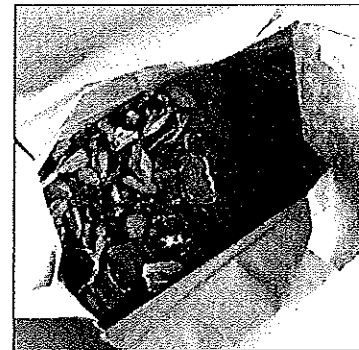
Lizards and seahorses



Donkey skin glue and Deer antler glue



Deer antler



privet fruit, matrimony fruit, ginseng



Remaining ingredients

Photos and Rx from the website <http://aolisi.net/index.html> — Howard Wallace

However what is documented is that Master Li taught his biographer, Yang Sen (1884-1977), a rare and curious elixir to extend youthful health and vigor, and (once again) increased male libido. It is sometimes called "Spring Wine."

*Li Ching Yuen is said to have outlived twenty-three wives and at his death was living with his twenty-fourth, a woman of 60. Another account, which in 1928 credited him with 180 living descendents, comprising eleven generations, recorded only fourteen marriages. [N.Y. Times, 5.6.1933].*

### Spring Wine

The information on page 48 is derived and adapted from the outstanding web site: <http://aolisi.net/ChunJiu.htm> which carries information about Yang Sen's formula. It is offered for educational purposes only.

This article centers on the herbal teachings of Li Ching Yuen, but Li taught—and attributed—his longevity, physical health, and vigor also to qigong and Taoist (Daoist) physical exercises and meditations. He emphasized what he called "Eight Diagram Active Kung [Cultivation]." See *Qigong Teachings of a Taoist Immortal*, by Stuart Alve Olson, and *Taoist Health Exercise Book*, by Da Liu. The later also discusses medicinal herbs and food.

A somewhat similar version of Li's qigong recommendation (today this is often called the "Seated Eight Brocades") is available on the Internet. Go to <http://www.herbalshop.com> and click on "Qi Chong Exercise".

Whatever Li Ching Yuen's exact age, he lived a very long time and was in good health and vigorous. Yang Sen lived until 93. When he was 90 he married a 17 year old girl; the next year she was pregnant with his child. Yang's students, both famous Taiji masters, Da Liu lived until 96. T.T. Liang lived to venerable age of

102. All were in good health and very much alive until the end. ■

*John Voigt is currently writing a book on Asian Spiritual Weight Loss. He may be contacted at <[john.voigt@comcast.net](mailto:john.voigt@comcast.net)>.*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Yang Sen, General. 二百五十歲人瑞實記 / (*Er Bai Wu Shi Sui Ren Rui Shi Ji*) ["A Factual Account of the 250 Year-Old Good-Luck Man."] Taipei: Chinese and Foreign Book Publishers (中外圖書出版社).

[Both Olson and Da Liu draw heavily on Yang Sen's definitive study of Li Ching Yung. To find libraries holding Yang's book (again only in Chinese) use the internet and go to [worldcat.org](http://worldcat.org). The OCLC number of the 1970 ed. is 29851575. Eight libraries in the United States, one in Canada, and two in China are shown owning it. The 1976 edition also appears; its OCLC numbers are 33457255 and 213769402.

Da Liu. *The Tao of Health and Longevity*. Marlowe.

Da Liu. *The Tao and Chinese Culture*. Schocken.

Olson, Stuart Alve. *Qigong Teachings of a Taoist Immortal: The Eight*

*Essential Exercises of Master Li Ching-yun*. Healing Arts Press. [The best book on Li's seated qigong. No mention of herbs.]

For Spring Wine see Daniel P. Reid's *Chinese Herbal Medicine*. Shambhala; and Reid's *The Tao of Health, Sex, & Longevity*. Fireside. Also Thomas Joiner. *The Warrior as Healer*. Healing Arts Press.

### WEB SITES

Wikipedia was consulted for Li Ching Yuen. From its "External Links" there is the May 15, 1933 issue of *TIME* magazine, and Li Ching Yuen's obituary as printed in the *New York Times*. Also a link to *Muscle/Tendon Changing and Marrow/Brain Washing Chi Kung* by Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming, which has the photograph and some text. Wikipedia was also used for "Wolfberry," and "Ginseng."

Subhuti Dharmananda. *Ho-Shou-Wu What's in an Herb Name* at <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/hoshouwu.htm>

For [Seated] Eight Brocades see <http://www.herbalshop.com> and click on "Qi Chong Exercise".

For Spring Wine consult <http://aolisi.net/ChunJiu.htm>

### CHINESE 'DISNEYLAND' PLANNED FOR SOUTH AFRICA

*International Construction 2009*: China's Huaqiang Holdings Limited is planning a US\$250 million, 190 acre Disneyland-style theme park in Johannesburg, South Africa, according to state news agency *Xinhua*.

Huaqiang, which is based in Shenzhen, will work with China Development Bank, the China-Africa Development Fund, and the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa to construct the park, said the report.

The park will consist of three zones: Chinese culture, African culture and world culture, according to Liang Guangwei, chairman of the board of Huaqiang Holdings Limited.

Construction is expected to start later this year with completion due three years later.

Huaqiang is a state-owned company engaged in electronics and sugar production. It expanded into making 3D cinema equipment eight years ago. It has built, or is in the process of constructing, amusement parks in five Chinese cities.

It started building a theme park in Iran in May 2008 and has plans for theme parks in the Ukraine and Nigeria.