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The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association



Tai Chi Chuan

Number 13 • Spring 2004

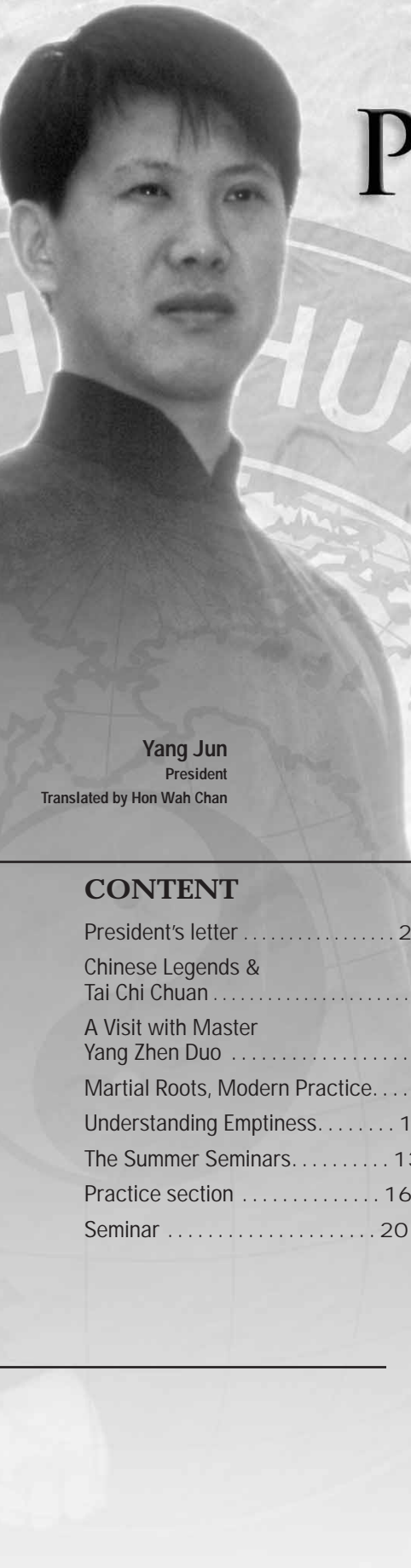
CHINESE LEGENDS &
TAI CHI CHUAN

A VISIT WITH
MASTER
YANG ZHEN DUO

MARTIAL ROOTS,
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UNDERSTANDING
EMPTINESS

THE SUMMER SEMINARS
An Interview with Master Yang Jun



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Member,

Although it is still early in 2004, we are planning activities for 2005. I would like to announce some news. The 2002 China trip has left a great impression and beautiful memories for everyone involved. Many people are hoping to return to China and feel the warmth of the extended Tai Chi family once again. 2005 will be a very special year for this event. First, it will be my grandfather's eightieth birthday. At the same time, we will hold the first disciple ceremony for Western students. Also, this is the tenth anniversary for the Yang Cheng Fu Tai Chi Chuan Centers. Based on all these occasions, the International Association is organizing a trip to China in July, 2005.

On this trip, we will include the birthday celebration and the disciple ceremony; the anniversary celebration for the Yang Cheng Fu Tai Chi Chuan Centers and Tai Chi Chuan demonstrations and exchange; ranking examination for beginning and intermediate students; a seminar at Wu Tai Mountain; and a tour of some of the scenic and historical places in China. By this summer, we will have more details available on our web site and in the next issue of the Journal. If you are interested in joining this trip, I hope you will start planning early.

The seminar schedule for this year has been posted on our web site. I really enjoy teaching these seminars. Whenever I go to a seminar, I am able to see old friends and meet new Tai Chi friends. We get to know each other through the teaching/learning process. I feel every student is very eager to learn! This encourages me to explain each movement in great detail. I taught over 20 seminars last year. Although I was a bit tired, I felt very satisfied and happy. With the growth of our Tai Chi Chuan enterprise, I will be doing more traveling and teaching. These seminars have become part of my life. I would like to thank everyone involved in organizing and taking part in these seminars. Thank you for supporting the development of Tai Chi. ☯

Yang Jun

President

Translated by Hon Wah Chan

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Chinese Legends & TAI CHI CHUAN

Many of the form names in Tai Chi Chuan have associations with classical Chinese poetry and legends. Here are two such stories, the first relates to the Sword form sequence, "Na Zha explores the sea" and the second explains the "White Snake spits out its tongue" in the Hand form.

Researchers: Sara Olsen and Andy Lee

NA ZHA

Portrayed as a child holding a magic ring and standing on fiery wheels, Na Zha was the son of the pagoda god, Li Jing. Na Zha was born with magical powers such as the ability to move at great speed. One day, he was bathing in the sea and he accidentally killed the son of the sea-dragon king. The dragon king blamed Na Zha's father

for not having brought him up properly, and reported the matter to the Emperor, The Supreme Daoist ruler. To relieve his father of blame, Na Zha killed himself. Meanwhile, Na Zha's martial arts master made a replica of him and Na Zha's spirit took possession of the replica. People dreamt about him and began to pray to him.



Consequently, his mother built a shrine to his memory and it was reported that Na Zha always answers the prayers of his devotees. Na Zha eventually became a popular deity.

THE LEGEND OF LADY WHITE SNAKE

One of the best-known Stories from Chinese literature is the *Legend of Lady White Snake*. First, found as a short story during the Tang Dynasty (618 AD), this tale has been rewritten many times over the centuries with characters added and changed, the beginning and ending altered, and the story changed from a cautionary tale to a love story.

In the eighteenth century, the story further evolved into a series of episodes for the Chinese Opera. It is this opera form that is best known to people in most parts of the world, including China. The complete story should have at least 16 episodes. Here is one version of the legend.

Once upon a time, in the mountain E-Mei lived a white snake and a green snake. They used their magical powers to transform into two beautiful young ladies, one in white, one in green. On the Duan-Qiao Bridge of the West Lake in Hang Zhou city, they met a man named Xu Xian with whom White Snake fell in love at first sight. They were married soon after.

Lady White and her husband opened an herbal medicine store, wrote, and filled prescriptions. Patients unable to pay were given free treatment and medicines, which caused the store to become very popular. One day a monk named Fa Hai saw the couple as they were leaving their store. He warned



Xu Xian that his wife was a white snake, but Xu Xian did not believe him.

It was the time of the Dragon Boat Festival, when Chinese families decorate their houses and drink wine to drive away the spirits. This was dangerous to Lady White and Lady Green since they were spirits. Further, Lady White was pregnant and her magical power had weakened. She tried to drink wine to please her husband, but its effects caused her to lose control. She ran to her room and returned to her snake form just as she got to her bed. Xu Xian entered the room, saw the large white snake coiled on their bed, and fell down, dead from fright.

Grief-stricken, Lady White traveled to Kun Lun mountains to steal a magic herb to restore her husband's life. Her attempt almost ended in failure, until the God of Longevity took pity on her and gave her the magic herb. When Lady White revived Xu Xian, she was able to convince him that he had not seen the white snake.

Xu Xian was still uneasy and went to the Golden Mountain (Jin Shan) Temple to see Fa Hai. The monk told Xu Xian that he must become a monk to separate himself from the snake spirit, and he agreed. Lady White traveled to Jin Shan with Lady Green to beg Fa Hai to let her husband go, but he refused. In anger, Lady White called on a great army of underwater creatures for help and she brought forth a flood over the Jin Shan Temple. Using his magic powers, Fa Hai made the mountain grow so that it was above the floodwaters. Her powers

weakened by her pregnancy, Lady White gave up the battle to await her child's birth. Unable to continue the fight alone, Lady Green escaped and spent her time in practice to increase her magic power and her fighting skills.

After their son was born, Xu Xian went to visit, taking with him a magical hat from Fa Hai. Xu Xian trapped Lady White in her snake form underneath the hat. Fa Hai then further imprisoned her, in the snake form, under the Thunder Mountain Pagoda.

After Lady White and Xu Xian's son had grown, Lady Green returned and destroyed the Pagoda, rescuing Lady White. Lady Green defeated Fa Hai. Consequently, Xu Xian, Lady White and their son were reunited, and they all lived happily ever after.

Some of the variations that can be found in other versions of Lady White Snake are:

- Lady Green Snake is a green fish
- Lady Green Snake is a black snake
- Xu Xian was an immortal when White Snake fell in love with him.
- Xu Xian saved White Snake in a previous life
- Her son saves Lady White Snake from Thunder Pagoda
- Buddha releases Lady White Snake from Thunder Pagoda
- Fa Hai's 'magic hat' that traps Lady White Snake is a bowl
- Fa Hai is turned into a crab

The White Lady that one meets in the opera versions is very different from the White Snake spirit in the earliest tale. She was a demon who

tempted her victims and then drained the life from them. Lady White is a spirit, but her main feature is her enduring love for Xu Xian. She harms no one, but does much good for the people through her herbal medicine.

Lady Green, while not as powerful as Lady White is nonetheless her constant companion and stalwart champion. She stands ready to engage in fine swordplay when needed.

The monk Fa Hai, seemingly on the side of virtue, becomes a villain through his insistence that snakes (spirits) and men cannot live together in harmony, even while Xu Xian and Lady White are living in married bliss.

Why is the story so popular and enduring? Lady White Snake deals with the basics of love, loyalty, betrayal, and power. It is no wonder the story has evolved throughout the centuries. It is likely to continue to change with the times as it continues to entertain its audiences. ☯

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A VISIT

with master

YANG ZHEN DUO



By Jeremy Blodgett



This year on the sixth day of the Spring Festival I visited Master Yang Zhen Duo at his home in Taiyuan. By the sixth day, most formal New Year activities are over, and I was invited to visit at 9 a.m. I had a hard time finding his home this time as the new McDonalds on the street corner replaced the run-down department store that used to be my landmark. Yang Zhen Duo and his wife live several miles outside of downtown on the first floor of a typical, drab six-story apartment building for a work unit. In front of their building is a dirt courtyard where the neighbors join

them in practice in the mornings.

Master Yang opened the door, wearing a beautiful traditional silk jacket. Walking around, I try to detect the changes in their cozy home from the last time I visited. For the most part it is the same: wood floors, one bedroom, study, and a living room like a museum filled with treasures from his travels around the world. The living room is full of colorful, fragrant blooming plants that groups of students brought during their New Year's visits. Hanging above their two large sitting chairs are the two immense, professionally done

photographs from a recent trip to Hainan. Along the other wall of the living room is a massive cherry wood display case packed with a lifetime of awards, pictures and gifts.

Hanging on the top of the display case is a powerful picture of the five styles' representatives. Master Yang stands in the middle, with everyone holding hands in unity and thrusting their arms up in the air. The five gathered last November in Guangzhou for the International Tai Chi Forum. The other styles' representatives in the picture are Chen Zhen Lei (Chen style), Sun



Yong Tian (Sun style) and Wu Wen Han and Ma Hai Long (the two Wu styles).

The main focus of the Forum was to promote Tai Chi within technical schools, colleges and universities. Currently, students in these schools are required to study Tai Chi for leisure and health, being taught the national 24-form during athletics class. Since the 24-form is a composite of the different styles, students don't get a true taste of the individual styles. And the class time is too short to learn a traditional form. The five representatives all decided to create 16-posture short forms, changing from the shorter 13-posture forms. College students will then be allowed to select which style they want to learn. In principle, the students are introduced to the easier short form and can then later continue with the more difficult long form. This marks a significant change from the time when any kind of short form was not considered traditional. After the Forum's talks and demonstrations, seminars teaching the new 16-posture forms were held for the many university athletic directors and coaches in attendance. Everyone studied

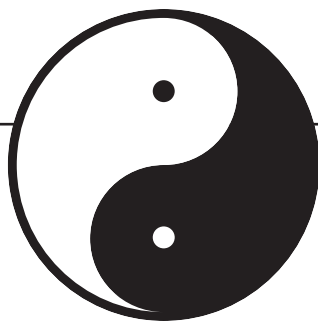
together and became familiar with the new forms.

At 10:30 a.m. I was politely preparing to go when Master Yang seemed surprised and said that they were preparing lunch and I should stay. I felt so lucky to share a meal with them. While his wife cooked we continued to talk as we watched a moving show about the Chinese aerospace program. He talked of his great grandson and praised Fang Hong, saying that without all her hard work and devotion Yang Jun and the Association would not be the success they are now. He also talked about his recent trip to Malaysia. Just prior to going to Guangzhou, Master Yang and his wife traveled to Kuala Lumpur and Penang for some events and a get together held by Yang style practitioners.

Master Yang said, "Yang Style Tai Chi is well developed in Malaysia and even though they all say it is Yang Style, there are some differences in the forms. But, in general we are the same with just some small differences. We should support each other and the differences shouldn't influence our relationship. Because I am the

elder member of the family, people are very polite and respectful to me, and the reaction was quite good. If we aren't together it is much harder to solve problems and there can be misunderstandings. But when we are all together at a table, it is much easier to solve any problem."

As I left I wondered when would be the next time I would see him and be back to Taiyuan. Possibly as soon as this summer. I am helping Dr. Glenda Quarnstrom, a student of Gary Lee in Grand Rapids, Michigan; arrange a month of taiji study in Taiyuan starting mid-May. Glenda has been busy getting ready and even travels to Troy, Michigan once a month to study with Han Hoong Wang. While in Taiyuan, she'll study primarily with Yao Jun Fang, another one of Master Yang's disciples, who leads a large group of practitioners at the Children's Park. As a professor of Chinese Politics and Asian Studies, Glenda will also research the history of women and elderly tai chi practitioners in China. If you are also interested in traveling to Taiyuan to study Tai Chi, you may contact Jeremy at jeremy@yangfamilytaichi.com. ☯



Singing Beijing Opera

MARTIAL ROOTS, *Modern Practice*



By Thérèse Mei Mei Teo

At seminars and when being interviewed, Grandmaster Yang Zhen Duo often points out that although Taijiquan originated as a martial art, nowadays it is practiced for health, longevity, balancing emotional states by the calming of the mind, thus having spiritual benefits. If it were limited just to the martial art aspect (the art of defense and attack), Yang style Taijiquan would not be so popular today.

During my years of teaching most new students come to learn Taiji, recommended by their doctors or therapist, as a slow form of calisthenics for handling stress, neck and back problems, etc. Others are searching for tranquility and personal growth. Very rarely do I get a student who wants to start because it is an internal martial art. For those who do, the process can take a long time. Just learning the short form can take at least a year. Putting into practice the basic principles takes more time and until one discovers the energies and is able to practice the fighting art aspects correctly, it can take between 5 to 10 years or more, depending on one's understanding, research and practice. It is faster to learn other forms of Kungfu or Japanese martial arts where one can show the fighting aspects almost from the beginning.

In a modern world beset by violence and aggression, students who are seeking Taiji as a practice form for health or a tool towards self-development, tend to shy away from what they construe as an "attack and defense" aspect, practicing the form without push hands or an understanding of the martial applications. However, what is our understanding of these martial art aspects of Taijiquan? One element is the practice of incorporating the 13 Kinetic Energies during the practice of hand form, weapons, push hands and applications. Sometimes called the 13 postures these include: the 5 steps, 4 square energy of Ward off, Rollback, Press and Push and the 4 corner energies of Grabbing, Splitting, Shoulder and Elbow strike. Training the form or push hands without understanding the internal energies will make the forms empty and during push hands, just the expression of brute strength.

Teachers have the responsibility of helping a student acquire higher skills gradually by making learning a meaningful, joyful and ongoing process. Right attitude from both teacher and student can make push hands a less frightening experience for some, as one is vulnerable and exposed in contact with another person. Emphasis on the practice of

the circles, connecting and yielding with a partner first, gives the meaning of feeling and understanding energy, instead of scuffling and jousting with brute strength. Then when one is able to use the energy by throwing one's partner off balance, it is "playfulness" and not hostility. Through push hands one is able to discover and be more aware of one's behavior or character and then is able to positively improve on that. Practicing applications does not imply combat, but a furtherance and continuation of studying Taijiquan. Both serve as a great opportunity to interact and study with another person.

For those who are not interested in push hands, the alternative to attaining internal energy can be found in the hand form. Once we have passed the beginning stage of learning the frame by frame of the form, we can apply the 10 basic essentials and principles as a foundation to our training. With a qualified teacher to instruct and guide, patient and regular self-training and research, one can develop and attain internal energy.

When we start the form, with proper relaxation, "sung", there is "peng jing" (ward off energy) this energy is not limited to just the form of right and left ward off: "Grasping the sparrow's tail." The moment we

start our Taiji, this energy begins and continues throughout the whole form, alive, expanding our awareness in body, mind and spirit.

The other martial art aspect, which is the moral code, is more applicable and can be integrated into our daily life:

1. To be humble. In the practice of taiji, even if we have acquired higher skills, we should not be arrogant. In the social environment, we should be less egocentric.
2. Showing respect, devotion, loyalty and honor especially towards one's teacher and family. The teacher has to be a good model of the same virtuous behavior.
3. Sincerity and truthfulness in our actions and words.
4. Courage. We all can't be heroes like in the old stories; however, we can be courageous in our present day situation. That is, to stand up to injustice and for what we believe in, fearless in the face of adversity and life's challenges.
5. Perseverance and patience. If one's practice is consistent and correct, there will be gradual development and the attainment of higher skills.
6. Compassion and benevolence. Our world has grown so busy, pursuing materialistic comforts and achievements. Everything has to be more and fast. The emotions and mind become "numb". Through Taiji there is a return and awakening to simplicity, sensitivity, openness of heart to love and compassion.

These aspects of virtues or conduct, although Chinese concepts, apply to our daily existence. Just illustrating within the practice of Taiji for example: one should not feel superior towards a fellow student just because one is practicing push hands and the other is not. The ability to go down low on "push down" or having the flexibility of kicking high in the stances in a younger or physically fit student, doesn't necessarily indicate higher skills. An elderly person or one who

is less flexible, might show less technique but more spirit. Another example is an overzealous student, who practices 8 to 10 hours a day of Taiji forms and neglects responsibilities to family and self. Our living environment and hygiene should reflect the mind of the Taiji practitioner: calm, clean and lucid.

Taijiquan should be a practice accessible for all. There should be respect for those who train for other purposes other than the fighting discipline and vice versa. Regardless of skill level, each individual has a choice of whatever path one wants to take. This Taiji journey can lead to better health, improve mental capacity, generate creativity, the list is endless. Taijiquan as a martial art is practiced not just as a technique, but a lifelong awareness practice of the integration and cultivation of body, heart-mind and spirit. Thus, contributing to a more harmonious and unified society, benefiting one's personal and spiritual growth as well as serving humanity.

Grandmaster Yang Zhen Duo is the epitome of the true martial artist. He is like a father to me and has been an exemplary figure throughout the years I have known him. As a teacher he is respectful towards his students, patient and persevering in his teaching. Even though he comes directly from the line of the Yang family, he does not criticize Taiji stylists of other schools, publicly or privately. Always humble, he is never boastful or prideful about his lineage or his Taiji. Often he would be apologetic and concerned that he was troubling someone if he needed a small favor to be done. He embraces life, appreciating good food and has a great sense of humor. We all have at some time or other witnessed his comical expressions and wit when showing examples during seminars. We can recognize his Jing, Qi and Shen so clearly whether he is performing bare hand or weapon forms, singing Beijing opera or writing calligraphy. He expresses it dynamically, when



Pushing hands with joy & spirit

his voice projects and booms across the room, calling out the names of the forms. Outwardly, his looks and posture are majestic and powerful. True to his Chinese sign, he has the prowess of the tiger. However, inwardly he is calm, gentle and warm hearted.

These are the many reasons why many of us choose him as our teacher and follow his family traditions. The creation and success of the International Yang style Tai Chi Chuan Association and Yang Chengfu Centers, under the leadership of Master Yang Jun is proof of that whatever race, color or creed, we are all one family in Taijiquan.

When I started my Taiji journey, more than twenty years ago, I had little idea where or what it would lead to. However, I felt it was right for me and I had to give it a chance. Discipline of practice was difficult in the beginning. With time, it has gotten easier and practice is a part of me now, like eating and sleeping. One of the greatest benefits that taiji practice has given me is the focusing of the mind, of being "here and now". Sharper perceptions and trusting my intuition has also helped me positively, personally and in my work. Good health and ample energy allows me to live and appreciate life to its fullest. I naturally became a Taijiquan teacher to give and pass on what has been given to me. Teaching taught me patience and compassion. Helping people to understand and improve their lives, physically, emotionally and spiritually is fulfilling. I have met and made wonderful friends in different parts of the world. Although I have come some way, sometimes I still feel like a beginner. There is so much more to develop and discover. I feel excited though and look forward to getting "old" and looking equally "spirited" like my hero, Grandmaster Yang Zhen Duo!

UNDERSTANDING EMPTINESS

In the old days people used to say: "If you are able to defend off a thousand pounds. If you cannot attract enemies. The words are simple, but the meaning is complex."



By Roque Severino

In our many contacts with Master Yang Jun, he insisted that we should send articles for the Tai Chi Journal. I would like to thank the Association for this opportunity and I hope that others can also contribute to the intellectual and spiritual improvement of the Yang family's practitioners.

We once asked Master Yang Jun about the highest goal in Tai Chi Chuan practice. He gave us the following answer: "You must achieve and understand 'emptiness' and help all human beings, especially the weak and the oppressed."

For many years now I have met with Tai Chi Chuan and Tibetan Buddhist masters in Brazil and in India. My teaching experience, however, has made me realize that, even with translations into Portuguese, transmitting the philosophical meaning of their words is not an easy task, since the Western way of thinking cannot easily grasp such deep and abstract concepts and symbolism. This makes it very hard for students and

practitioners to deviate from their views or behavior.

Just to illustrate, when we talk about the Buddhist Dharma, for example, be it in Chinese, Sanskrit or Tibetan, each word has three meanings: the ordinary or popular, the erudite or sophisticated, and the religious or Dharma meaning. In other words, when a scholar speaks, an ordinary man does not understand anything, and when a priest speaks, neither the scholar nor the ordinary man can understand him. Furthermore, there are 10 ways to understand a teaching, according to the context in which it is given.

You can then see how hard it is to understand Tai Chi Chuan teachings, preserved in such an elevated language as old erudite Chinese. We westerners would be too proud if we said that our simpler language allows us to understand the teachings of a realized master such as the Great Master Yang Zhenduo.

Take as an example the English language used by Shakespeare, the Portuguese language used by Camões in Os Lusíadas, or the Spanish language used in Don Quixote de la Mancha. They have nothing to do with the English, Portuguese and Spanish as they are spoken today. Which of us would dare to translate the Tao Te Jing? We know that understanding the language is not enough in itself. Who can say that they can easily understand Confucius's words?

One of the most frequent concepts used in Tai Chi Chuan is 'emptiness' and it was taken from the Taoist and Buddhist schools of thought. The study of this term began as early as 653 AD in China, coming from Ceylon with Bodhidharma, the 28th Buddhist patriarch also known in China as Damo. His teachings deeply

STANDING BUSINESS

*attract emptiness, you'll be able to use four ounces to
emptiness, you cannot fend off a thousand pounds.
complete. Beginners cannot understand it."*

Li I-Yu

influenced the Taoist philosophy of the time, and the 'Chan' school, also known as 'Zen' in Japan, arose from the union of these two great systems of thought - Taoism and Buddhism.

The term 'emptiness' has created so many problems and misunderstandings in the West that the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism decided to create committees of Western translators with a profound and practical knowledge of the Dharma. The idea was to explain Buddhist terminology to the public opinion in general, but particularly to sincere students and followers of Buddhism.

'Emptiness' means simply 'nothing' to us. We could say that in an ordinary context it could be applied to objects and routine situations such as the emptiness of a cup or of a room. In Tai Chi Chuan

philosophy, however, the concept of 'emptiness' acquires a deep and elevated dimension that makes students question their own lives. And that is how the great Buddhist and Taoist masters came to this concept.

In Buddhism, 'emptiness' was more concisely explained during the second cycle of teachings given by the master Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, during which he explained the prajna paramita sutra, i.e. 'the perfect knowledge that is far beyond excellence'. In this context it is said:

"Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of true freedom, understands through the practice of the great wisdom that the five skandas or psychological components of the ego-centered state of being (form, feeling, perception, concept and consciousness) are no more than emptiness, and thanks to this comprehension he helps all those who suffer. O, Sariputra, phenomena are not different from emptiness,

and emptiness is not different from phenomena."

"The Tibetan Book of the Dead" explains that the first component is form (rūpa), the beginning of individuality and separate experience, and the division of experience into subject and object. Now there is a primitive 'self' aware of an external world. As soon as this happens, the self reacts to its surroundings: this is the second stage, feeling (vedana). It is not yet fully developed emotion - just an instinctive liking, dislike or indifference, but immediately it grows more complicated as the centralized entity asserts itself by reacting not only passively but also actively. This is the third stage, perception (samjñā), in its fullest sense, when the self is aware of stimulus and automatically responds to it. The fourth component is concept (samskara), covering the intellectual and emotional activity of interpretation, which follows perception. It is what puts things together, and builds up the patterns of personality and

UNDERSTANDING EMPTINESS

karma. Finally there is consciousness (vijñāna), which combines all the sense perceptions and the mind. The self has now become a complete universe of its own; instead of directly perceiving the world as it really is, it projects its own images all around it. The fundamental teaching of the book is the recognition of one's projections and the dissolution of the sense of self in the light of reality. As soon as this is done, these five psychological components of the confused or unenlightened state of mind become instead factors of enlightenment.

In addition to 'emptiness', now we have one more concept to study in Tai Chi Chuan: the 'phenomena'. We should start from the second in order to better understand the first.

The word 'phenomena' may be applied to external objects, mental states and conflicting emotions. It is simple to understand its meaning regarding external objects, since both classical and quantum physics have on several occasions provided us with significant evidence by reducing the states of the matter to sizes such as 'Nano' that our ordinary intelligence cannot understand.

When it comes to mental states, the word is applied to our thinking. When we think, we are overwhelmed by two basic states - fear and hope. Fear is related to our memory of unpleasant past happenings, which we do not want to experience again, or of agreeable moments, which we want to experience again but are afraid may not return. This fear nurtures the hope that makes us build an imaginary or idealistic better life for ourselves, our relatives or our nation.

These two mental states cause us to feel the six conflicting emotions, which are pride or arrogance, envy

or jealousy, craving, stupidity or laziness, greed and hatred. These emotions follow us every day just as our shadow follows our body. When one practices Tai Chi Chuan or any activity in one's daily life, they permeate and manipulate one's subjective perception of the environment.

The great Tai Chi Chuan masters of the past fully attained this knowledge, and created, structured and preserved, with enormous personal sacrifice, the discipline that we practice and teach in the West today. Each Tai Chi Chuan movement also makes us apply four principles of this wisdom known as "The Four Great Attentions": complete attention to the body; complete attention to sensations, complete attention to the mind and complete attention to the phenomena.

By practicing these four supreme attentions, the mind stabilizes and transforms itself into what is known as samatha in Sanskrit, shine in Tibetan, chan in Chinese and zen in Japanese. Tai Chi Chuan is therefore a complete system of ethical, moral, psychological and spiritual transformation. In other words, it contributes to the development of the practitioner's most exalted qualities.

- Close attention to the body (attained by elongating the joints, breathing deeply, and keeping the back straight) increases one's vitality (chi) and enthusiasm; it therefore eliminates the causes of stupidity or laziness.
- Close attention to sensations (which appears during the training of the forms) eliminates the causes of the anxiety that nurtures one's desires, the non-fulfillment of which leads to frustration, inability to share (greed), and hatred towards oneself and others.

- Close attention to the mind (and its states such as satisfaction or discontent, happiness or suffering) eliminates arrogance, which produces mental instability.
- Close attention to phenomena (that is, to one's environment including the other practitioners) eliminates comparisons and judgments, which cause envy.

If we analyze these concepts carefully, we will clearly understand the meaning of 'emptiness'.

- Only when we are empty of pride and arrogance can we really relax and accept other people and understand their different viewpoints and behavior without trying to impose our own. This is when we experience equanimity and courtesy.
- Only when we are empty of stupidity or laziness can we have the willingness and find the time to practice constantly, and stop being prejudicial, superstitious and narrow-minded.
- Only when we are empty of cravings and hatred can we share our affection and knowledge without being afraid that other people may harm or manipulate us. Only then can we experience the idea of the Great Family and be together to share our aspirations, dreams, sorrows and joys.
- Only when we are empty of envy can we be free from neurotic competitiveness for awards, positions and status, which will only create further distance and anger between those who should simply cherish and honor each other in a brotherly manner.

Thank you and I hope that my words encourage many Tai Chi Chuan practitioners from our family to practice tirelessly in order to attain the most elevated levels of this art. ☯

THE SUMMER SEMINARS

An Interview with Master Yang Jun



DB: I'd like to talk with you about the Summer Seminars and what you are planning on presenting. Recently we have changed the length of the Hand Form Seminar from four days to three. Could you talk about the reasons for this change?

YJ: There are several reasons for the change. Generally speaking we now have 2 groups of students: one has already attended many seminars and knows the form and sequence and the others get together to learn more and practice together. In the summer my schedule is also very busy and four days was sometimes difficult for people to take the seminar. Shorter is easier for people. Also, by making the schedule a bit shorter is a little better for me as it allows me to rest a little more. That's why we mostly changed the schedule to 3-1/2 days.

DB: Now that many students are more familiar with the Traditional Yang Family Style basic requirements, what will you be focusing on to help students improve their practice?

YJ: Now when I teach, I'm gradually changing. Before the focus was on making the movements correct and in keeping with the Traditional standards. Now I'm focusing on the meaning of the motions and the internal

process. Now the teaching is getting deeper. The beginner can also learn and benefit but I want to make the people who have already learned become more interested, by developing their skills

DB: Understanding the application of the movements is an important development for students. Why is it important and how does this help to improve skill levels?

YJ: Tai Chi Chuan is multiple function exercise. Different people can take different approaches according to what they want. Some people want to do it for health and they practice the form everyday and that's enough for them. Some people are more interested in learning about the history, and seek more understanding of the martial applications. If you can understand each movement's meaning, how is it connected with the martial techniques you can coordinate the internal process with the external motions. This is the Principle of Inside and Outside coordinated. Our theory says we must harmonize the spirit and chi and essence of the body. If you don't know the reason behind the movement it's hard for you to concentrate the spirit and promote your chi circulation. Understanding the inside meaning helps you coordinate inner and outer body movements. If you don't know the movements it's hard for the



Conducted by **Dave Barrett**
Transcribed by **Nancy Lucero**



mind to lead the movements, hard to concentrate. Knowing the applications, the meaning of the movements, and the techniques of the movement is important and from this practice it is easier to combine your internal thoughts and external movements.

DB: In the past the Hand Form Seminar has started at the beginning and covered the entire Long Form. Is this still the method you will be using?

YJ: For the summer seminars I will do that but for weekend seminars I will be more flexible because their time is shorter. Some Centers want to concentrate on one section. For example last year I went to Virginia and they used 2 days for just section 2. Also, when I went to NJ the first time I only did 1/2 of the 49 form. The summer seminars will cover the entire form. It's a bigger seminar – the weekend 2 day sessions are like a special time and more for the people who are nearby their centers.

DB: You spent many years traveling with your Grandfather and watching him teach. Could you talk about what you have learned about his teaching style that is helpful to you now that you are the head teacher?

YJ: For sure – From the time I was a baby I lived with my grandparents and no matter if I paid attention to how he taught, I learned. After I was grown up – together with my grandfather we have taught together and watching him it was like a model for me. I try to follow his teaching method and also I have learned many things – especially from his personality. I know when I was a teenager, I was not very nice – I made things difficult. By following my grandfather and watching him, I naturally learned to correct myself and to be more patient. I try to do as much as I can to follow my grandfather and during my teaching I try to understand my students and try to answer their questions.

DB: I was always impressed by Yang Laoshi's ability to work with a large group. Your Grandfather is able to make the instruction very personal, so that even in a large group each student can learn something. How does he do this?

YJ: I think it's by explaining the movements more clearly and more deeply. More clear: everyone can learn something and more deep: it's good for people who want more understanding of the movements. The more it's explained, the more things are covered for all students at all levels. So he makes it very clear. I try to do this too. I also try to explain as much as I can. When I'm with a large group I also try to do this. All things, how to teach, I learned from my grandfather. I also have learned from how I teach – by teaching others I have learned. From teaching you can find the feeling from your students on how they are learning – from their facial expressions. When I teach, I try to find the feeling from the people and the feeling from the students helps me teach.

DB: I think your grandfather's great gift is that he has a wonderful feeling when he teaches. His feeling is clear, happy, interested and humble and I think that many people naturally understand and admire that.

YJ: Yes, that's right. This is also one part I learned from him. He's very humble. By being humble you earn people's respect.

DB: Your English has improved greatly and you are now teaching without an interpreter. How do you feel this has changed your experience in teaching Tai Chi?

YJ: First, I think many people have helped me help learn English. Before I spoke English I used to do more movements, then the students would help me learn the words. Now I'm here more than 4 years and actually, I'm traveling a lot so just about 4 years and my English, I don't have a chance to go to school to study. Most of what I know and have learned is from teaching classes. I know how to say words but don't know how to write so well.

I feel closer to the people I teach. Also, the feeling is different because if you always use a translator your motion cannot continue because you have to wait and then you forget what you're trying to say. It breaks the motion and it's like the car stops and goes – the feeling is not even and you cannot fully control the feeling of the seminar. However, using a translator can also be very good because they can translate the motion and sound. Both sides have good things. First, I speak English, it's simple English, not very fancy and not knowing many words I often repeat words but I think I can make people understand what I'm saying. With a translator, they have very good English and they can use clearer words to help people understand more. Most people at seminars now feel like I'm a little better at English and don't need an interpreter.

Now that I'm living in the U.S. most people speak English, I use it often and when I teach class I use English and now I speak English. Sometimes now I get in a little trouble and suddenly now when I teach in Chinese I have to think about how to say it in Chinese instead of English. The thinking way is now a little reversed. In my memory the Tai Chi theories are in classical Chinese, I memorized them in classical Chinese and it's hard for me to use English to explain clearly. I use 2 languages – I use English and then body language – what I show with my body. This is an important point – body language everybody can see no matter what language they speak. From watching me they can understand what I'm talking about.

DB: You have worked with hundreds of students in many different countries. If you could pick three main areas that students need to improve what would they be?

YJ: Different areas are different but from most people (not everyone) first they need more understanding of the theory of Tai Chi Chuan - this is a little weak.

An Interview with Master Yang Jun

DB: When you talk about theory are you talking about the 10 essential principles?

YJ: Not only that – that's basic information for movements and how you practice. Tai Chi Chuan theory is very rich and when you are doing the solo forms for example – the 10 Essentials help you to practice by yourself. How you practice with your opponent, this is another set of theories.

People need to have a deeper understanding of theory. It's an internal martial art. How do you show this internal part? That part is not that difficult because we have people translating from books so there is a lot of information. Some people are very good with theory, our website discussion board, for example – many people understand but most people need more.

I think another other part is the basics – most people do not pay enough attention to basics. They are in a hurry and want to learn fast. They don't pay enough attention to the basics. Most people have this habit. This part is important because it helps you make your practice more natural. For example: your footwork – your legs are not strong enough and when you go to the low posture your energy gets tight, you hold your breath, that's one of the problems. Also if your footwork is not in the right direction it's hard to make your upper body correct. This is important.

Many people practice quite often actually but there is one part of their training that's not enough. They have not very much knowledge and experience with Push Hands. We use Push Hands to understand your form – your energy. During the solo form practices you don't have a real opponent with you – you just imagine by yourself. When you practice with an opponent it is different. Understanding Push Hands helps you understand Tai Chi Chuan more, especially the hand techniques. Most people here do not have enough experience with Push Hands.

DB: Is this something that we would want to include in the summer seminars?

YJ: This is difficult to have because you always need a partner. We would need to have a limited group, a small group, time by time and practice some basics. Some things are not difficult to learn – single arm and circling. Any teacher can teach you this. You still can learn basic energies – sticking, adhering, following.

DB: What advice can you give to students coming to their first Seminar? Perhaps they have learned the simplified 24 form or other versions of Yang Style Tai Chi?

YJ: For the people who have learned the 24 form the first trouble is to remember the long form sequence because the 24 form is short and the sequence is different. To remember the whole sequence in 3 days is already a good challenge for people who are joining us for the first time and doing the 24 form.

For people who have learned another version of Tai Chi Chuan: in China we have a saying that learning a form is easy – changing a form is not. Some techniques may be different-different habits will be hard. You always want to go back to the old way of practicing. To know when a correction is made – you will have to take notice and observe yourself to change. Your mind may understand but it will take time for your body to make the changes.

I think it's an important point to make for new people because this is a chance to observe and try the Traditional Yang Family form and then they can make a decision and compare and they can decide if they want to change or not.

Nancy Lucero: What can people do to keep themselves from getting too tired during a summer seminar?

YJ: After 2 days people start to feel the time – even in your regular practice – you normally don't practice 5 hours a day. Many people enjoy the summer seminars because it's

like being in heaven. You don't go to work, you don't cook food, you just study Tai Chi. If you don't practice Tai Chi everyday after 2 days of five hours of classes you start to get tired. Sometimes you feel very tired because you're not too used to it. You have to try and organize yourself enough. Try to conserve your energy in class and after class when you get tired, don't practice so much. Many students will practice in the evenings after a day of classes, because right away you want to review – you don't practice 5 hours – you practice 8 hours a day. If you get too tired in class you lose concentration. Depending on how much your body can take you need to pace yourself.

DB: One thing I noticed about your Grandfather: as the day grew longer and more hours of the class would go by, he would get stronger and more excited and his strength would increase.

YJ: Yes, during your practice you're full of energy and into the class, you don't feel tired. You can feel your spirit rise up. But after class when you get relaxed you can feel more tired.

DB: Teaching 20 seminars over the last year is a phenomenal accomplishment! It seems you are always traveling and teaching. Did you ever think you would be so busy?

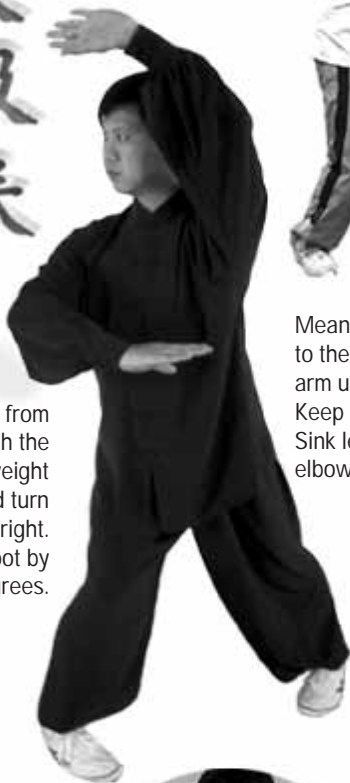
YJ: I have known this for a long time- Tai Chi Chuan will always keeps developing and my teaching and teaching seminars is one of the ways to help Tai Chi Chuan develop. This is part of my life.

DB: On behalf of Tai Chi Chuan students the world over I would like to thank you for all your hard work and travel and wish you and your family a bright and successful future!

YJ: From teaching seminars I feel people respect me and treat me very nice and they have a lot of respect for my family. This part makes me work harder and do as much as I can do. ☯

太极拳

Following from "Fan through the back", shift weight backward and turn body to the right. Turn in left foot by 135 degrees.



Meanwhile, press right arm down to the front of the body, circle left arm up above forehead. Keep both arms rounded. Sink left shoulder and lower left elbow, open right armpit.



When opponent strikes from the back, use right arm to press opponent's arm down and divert his strike to the side.



Lift right to the front, both legs bow.

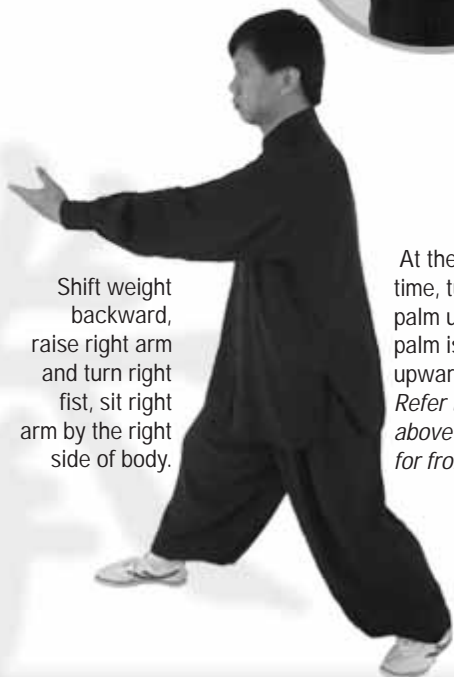


Shift weight backward, right hand gradually forms fist. At the same time, rotate right foot with right toes touching ground.



Shift weight backward, raise right arm and turn right fist, sit right arm by the right side of body.

At the same time, turn left palm until the palm is facing upwards. Refer to the above figure for front view.

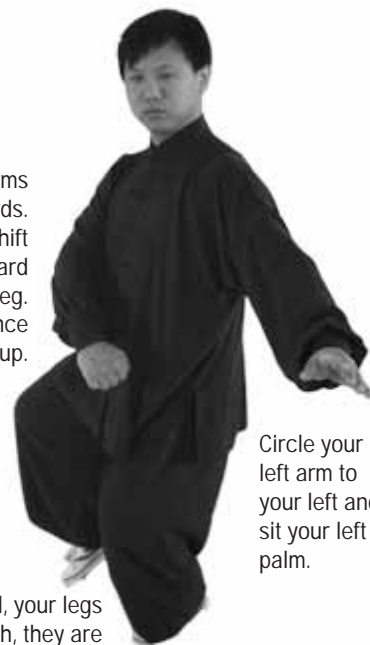


Continue to shift weight backward, move right arm forward, and pull in left arm in front of the body.



Circle both arms downwards. Meanwhile, shift weight backward and lift right leg. Keep your balance and do not stand up.

On this step forward, your legs are not shoulder width, they are on the two sides of a single line.



Circle your left arm to your left and sit your left palm.

Circle right fist up and strike at opponent's face.



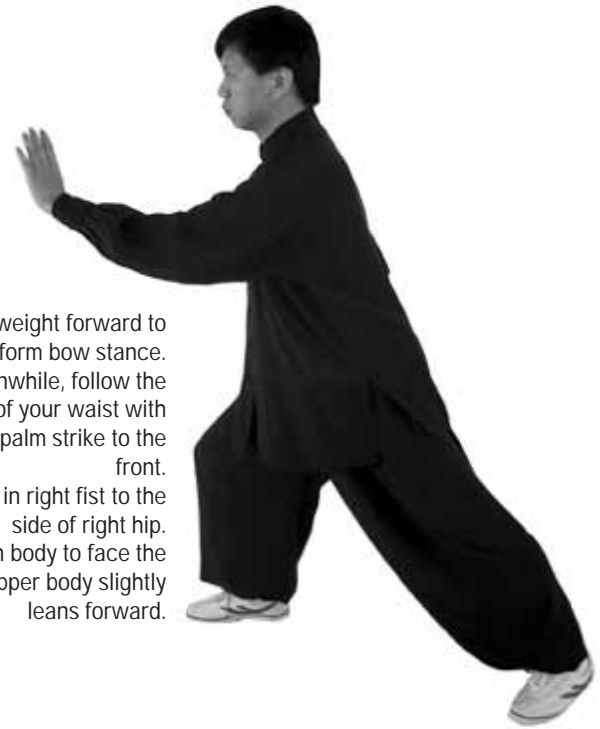
If the right fist misses the target, shift weight forward to form bow stance, use left palm to strike at opponent's heart.

leg back and then step
nt, keep the distance of
s the same as a regular
stance and at shoulder
width apart.



While stepping out right leg, right arm circles up striking with the back of the fist, lower left arm and sit left palm. Round right arm and keep right fist about the same level as your face, sit left arm on the body's left side, open left armpit and keep left elbow down.

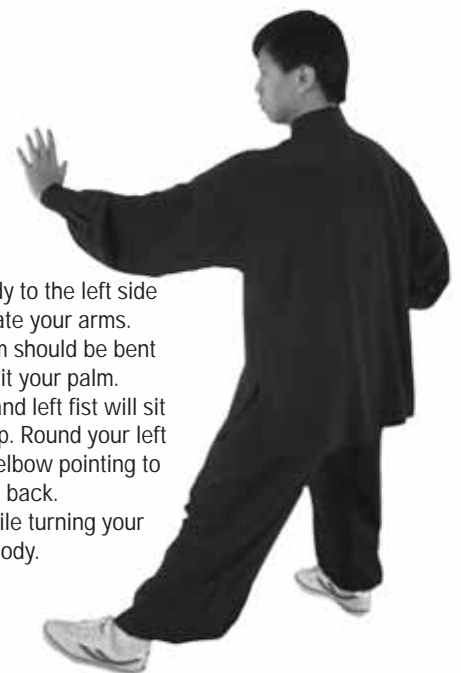
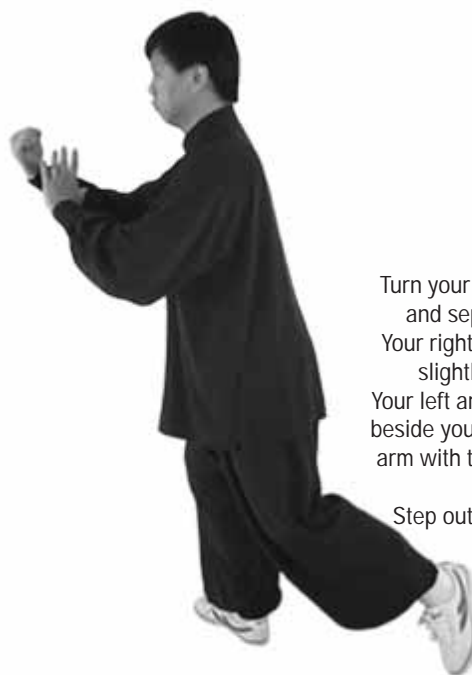
Shift weight forward to form bow stance. Meanwhile, follow the turning of your waist with a left palm strike to the front. Bring in right fist to the side of right hip. Turn body to face the front. Upper body slightly leans forward.



Make sure that the fist is palm down with the eye of the fist facing your body.

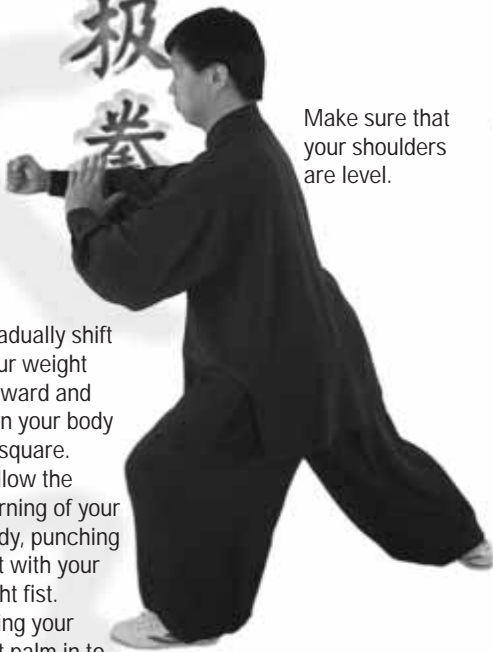


Turn your body to the left side and separate your arms. Your right arm should be bent slightly. Sit your palm. Your left arm and left fist will sit beside your hip. Round your left arm with the elbow pointing to the back. Step out while turning your body.

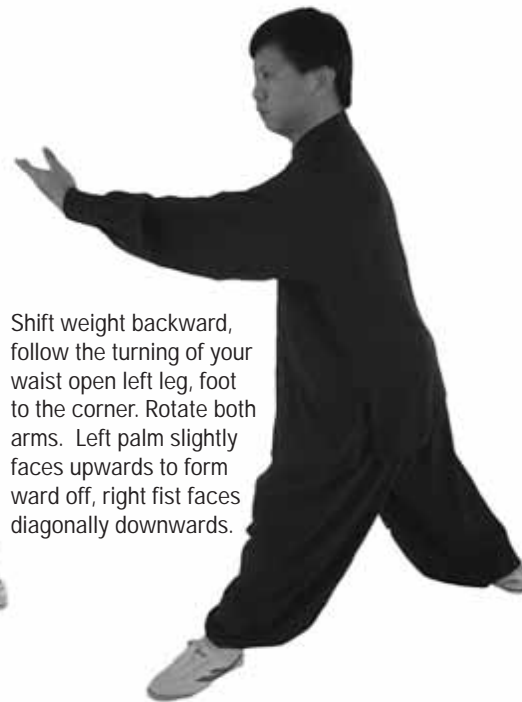


太极

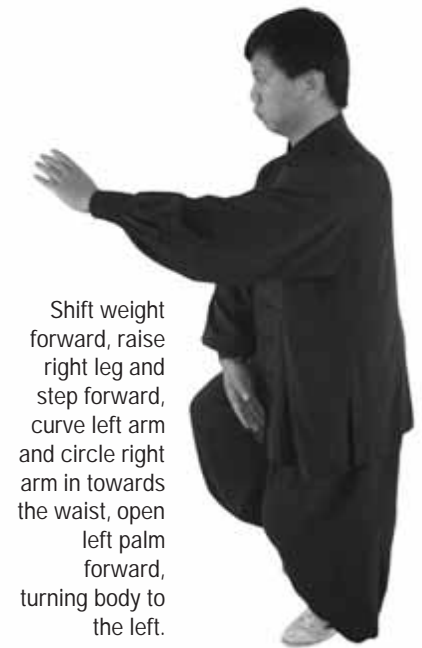
Gradually shift your weight forward and turn your body to square. Follow the turning of your body, punching out with your right fist. Bring your left palm in to sit beside your right forearm at the same time.



Make sure that your shoulders are level.



Shift weight backward, follow the turning of your waist open left leg, foot to the corner. Rotate both arms. Left palm slightly faces upwards to form ward off, right fist faces diagonally downwards.



Shift weight forward, raise right leg and step forward, curve left arm and circle right arm in towards the waist, open left palm forward, turning body to the left.

This move finishes when your weight is 70% in your left leg and both the arms and torso are facing the corner (45°).



BEGINNING OF PRESS: Use the rotation of the waist to bring your left palm into contact with your the middle of your right forearm. Your weight is still in your left side.



Make sure that the whole left palm is touching your forearm, and that you keep your right arm rounded with the palm facing slightly upward.



PRESS: Shift your weight forward while bending your right leg. Meanwhile, your two arms should press forward. Keep your body just left of square and bend your torso forward naturally. Your right elbow should be in line with your right knee.

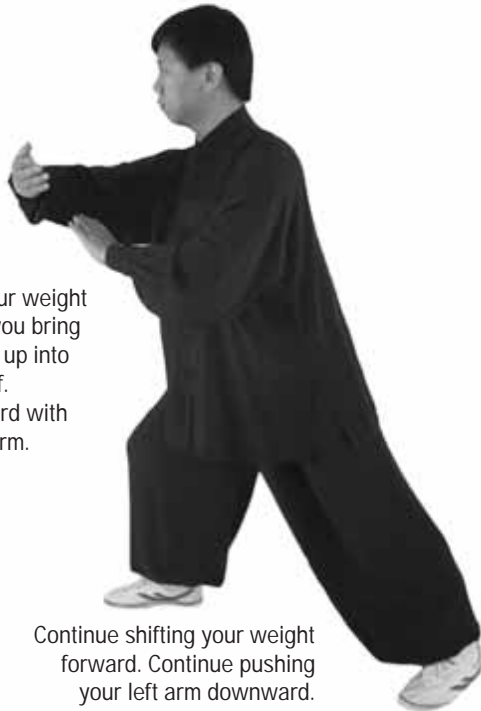
Remember to sink your chest, round your back, and open your armpits. **DO NOT LEAN BACK.**

Throughout the turn, make sure that your eyes are following your right hand and looking forward. Keep your two arms rounded and your left armpit open. When you finish the turn, your palms should be like you are holding an arm.



Right leg steps forward, both arms close by left side of body.

Start shifting your weight forward while you bring your right arm up into ward off. Push downward with your left arm.



Continue shifting your weight forward. Continue pushing your left arm downward.



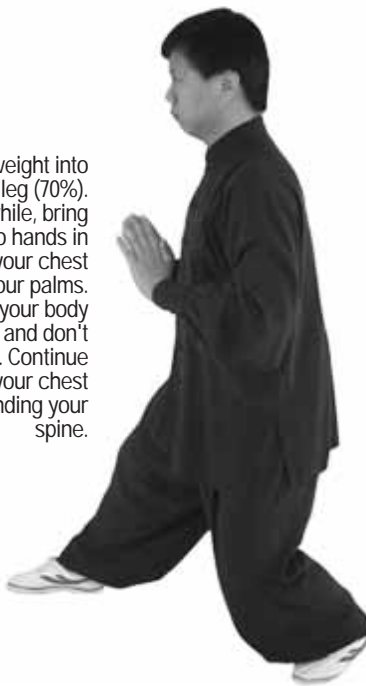
Continue using your waist to turn your two arms until they reach the corner.

《 MAKE SURE THAT YOUR RIGHT WRIST IS STILL BENT SLIGHTLY AND YOUR ELBOW IS STILL DOWN. 》



Turn your body to square while separating your arms.

Shift your weight into your back leg (70%). Meanwhile, bring your two hands in front of your chest and lift your palms. Keep your body square, and don't lean back. Continue sinking your chest and extending your spine.



PUSH: your hands are straight out from your body and shoulder width apart. Keep your arms straight but not locked.



Make sure you sit your wrists and have your torso square to the West and angled slightly forward.

You should be in a standard bow step.

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