

國際楊氏太極拳協會

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China ADVENTURE 2005



*Tai Chi
Chuan*
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HERITAGE TOUR AND
MASTER YANG ZHEN DUO'S
80TH BIRTHDAY
CELEBRATION

EDITORIAL



Dave Barrett, Editor

You really know you are going somewhere when you have to sit on a plane for 12 hours to get there. Emerging from the international arrival area into the crowd of hundreds of people waiting for their parties, we spotted the Association's logo and were met by our smiling friends: Wei and Master Yang Jun's daughter Ning. They led us to a waiting bus and so began our China Adventure. For the next 20 days we traveled into the heart of China visiting places that have enchanted poets and painters for thousands of years.

The next day we had our first taiji practice in an alley way behind the hotel; a group of 50 foreigners and Master Yang Jun in the early light of a Shanghai morning. From time to time we had to break ranks to let a bicycle go by. Shanghai is such a cosmopolitan city that our group barely attracted a second glance. Boarding our buses for our first excursion everyone had the giddy good humor of school-children heading out on a field trip. Watching Shanghai roll by through the windows, one was stuck by the immense vitality of the street life, the shops were full of activity and everyone was busily getting about their business. The same scene played out all through the trip, the incredible energy of the Chinese economy, and the inexhaustible creativity of her workforce.

Walking into Zhouzhang village we left modern China behind and wandered through a town of canals and overhanging trees, graceful bridges and houses that have somehow survived the upheavals of the last 400 years of Chinese history. In one residence, the ordered serenity of the halls and gardens, the spare elegance of Ming Dynasty esthetics was deeply impressive. While the village was packed with tourists and shopkeepers chanting in English, "Hello, hello, come take a look!" there remained echoes of a calmer, slower pace of life; boats floating by instead of buses and motorbikes. That evening we were on a boat touring the heart of Shanghai's waterfront and were back, full throttle, into modern China. This was to be a constant theme of our tour: traveling through time, modern to ancient and back again, often in the same afternoon.

Our flight to Huangshan City the next evening was inexplicably delayed for over two hours. This was also a theme of our travels: rushing to the airports, checking in luggage for a group of 50 and then waiting for several hours for the plane to show up. Blessedly, we had some kids with us: the excellent Stephanie (8) from Montreal and Master Yang Jun's children: Ning (13) and Yajie (3) so that we passed these delays throwing paper airplanes or playing volleyball





with a balloon, or just generally misbehaving. We arrived at Huangshan City at midnight. The restaurant and staff had been waiting for 3 hours and so we obligingly sat down and enjoyed local Anhui delicacies such as frog stew and sautéed snakes. During our morning practice under the eaves of the hotel, the heavens opened up, lightning struck nearby, and it rained cats and dogs.

We left our heavy luggage at the hotel and with just a daypack of essentials we boarded the buses to ascend Yellow Mountain and spend the night up on Jade Screen Peak. The clouds were low, thunder frequent and rain heavy. We began to climb the steps to the tramway, the first of thousands we would tread,

looking up through the mists and wondering what was above. The cable cars sat six, as we lifted off into a cloud you couldn't see the next cable tower ahead. About half way up the mists began to part, my fellow travelers gasped in amazement, one began to weep at the beauty revealed. For we were in a landscape so different, so otherworldly and yet familiar from scroll paintings, that I must count this as one of the great scenic thrills of my life.

For the next 24 hours we were in a vertical landscape of towering pinnacles, shifting mists and ancient pines. That afternoon the skies cleared and we hiked the old routes across Yellow Mt. with names like, "a thread of sky", "guts testing wall",

"one hundred step cloud stairs". All were cut into the living granite, some hugging precipices with chain hand rails and a vertical drop of 800 meters. Sunset on Huangshan: fading views across the far horizon of endless mountains, fresh air and stars; this was truly a heaven on earth.

The next morning many of us rose at 4am to watch dawn break across the mountains. Our morning practice on the terrace in front of Jade Screen Peak was inspirational. As I turned to complete "flying diagonally" I felt as though I was soaring across the mountains like the immortal sages of old. Some of us decided to climb the Celestial Capital Peak that morning, descending past the Welcoming Pine, across the Heavenly Bridge and started the stairs upwards, s t r a i g h t u p w a r d s . About halfway up, in a heart-beat, clouds blew in, thunder clapped and it began to pour. Our intrepid guide shook his head and we were all relieved to head back down, as we really wanted to survive this excursion to see more of China!



Tai Chi Chuan

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Yang Jun

EDITOR
Dave Barrett

CONTRIBUTORS
Yang Jun
Dave Barrett
Roberta Lazzeri
Holly Sweeney
Sara Olsen
Bill Walsh

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Marco Gagnon
www.martialgraphic.com


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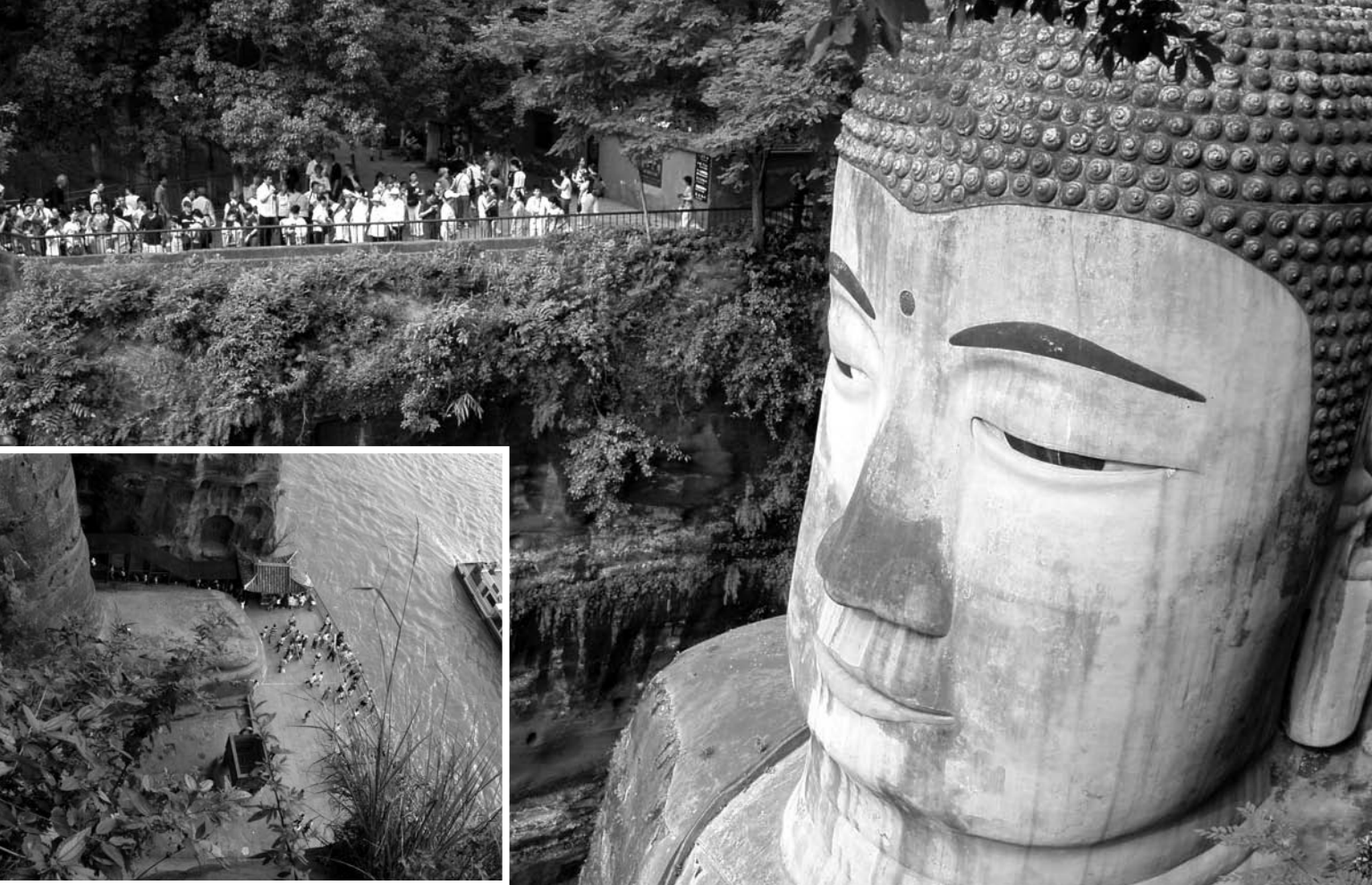
International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

**4076 148th Ave NE
Redmond, WA 98052 USA
Phone: 1-(425) 869-1185**

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On the way back up to Jade Screen Peak I encountered a porter with two large baskets hanging from a bamboo shoulder pole. He had a walking staff, shod in steel, with a V cut in the top and from time to time he would stop, set the staff under the cross pole and rest. I reckon he was in his late sixties, lean as a greyhound, in shorts and canvas sneakers, shirt wrapped around his shoulders in the pouring rain. He had been climbing for close to three hours from the town below carrying vegetables in one basket and a small office copier machine in the other. Watching him climb the steps, his gongfu was deep and impressive. There was an ancient rhythm to his work: one step up, then the load would bounce slightly and he would wait for the rebound upwards to take his next step. Everything up at the Jade Screen Peak hotel from soup spoons to sheets of plywood had been hand carried by porters up the vertical steps. Of course this has been going on for centuries on Huangshan; whole clans in the town below have been climbing these

steps for generations. Up at the top I saw him with empty baskets and I don't think his feet even touched the ground.

That afternoon, traveling back down the tram line, onto the buses, descending into the miasma of heat, pollution and noise that is modern China; there were still the clear winds of Huangshan blowing through our minds.

Across the street from our hotel in Huangshan City there was a park with the strangest statue: half camel and half sphinx, who watched us practice taiji as the unforgiving sun rose over the horizon. Most of the local exercise groups were already leaving the park as we assembled at 6:30am. We soon discovered that even at that time of day the heat in Southern China is like putting on a wet wool blanket.

We explored two villages: Xidi and Hong, unchanged since the Qing dynasty. They were mazes of narrow streets and old temples in the blistering midday sun. In the

afternoon, waiting for stragglers to return to the buses, I taught Stephanie and Ning how to skip stones on the lotus pond surrounding Hong village. Young Yajie wanted to play too, throwing handfuls of stones into the water and holding up both arms as if he had scored a goal in the World Cup. Master Yang Jun joined us as well, skipping his stones far across the water. For a moment the burdens of his role as trip leader fell away and he jumped with joy after a particularly excellent toss. Our flight back to Shanghai was delayed by the customary two hours. We arrived back at our Shanghai hotel at 1:00am for a 5:30am wake up call for our flight to Chengdu.

By now our group had formed an admirable esprit de corps: helpful, playful, patient, and happy. The traveling began to take its toll with some becoming ill from the change in diet and lack of sleep. Others stepped in to carry their bags and look out for their welfare. Stephanie's mom, Helen, is a doctor and we had two highly experienced



nurses as well in our group, along with enough medications to treat Napoleon's army in full retreat from Moscow. Before the trip was over we all benefited from their care.

In Szechuan province we visited several amazing places. Leshan (Happy Mountain) featured the largest Buddha in China, carved out of a riverside cliff. Walking up to the top of the cliff you saw what looked like a small hill with foliage. Coming closer and looking down it turns out this was the Buddha's head top and his feet were some 100 meters down at the riverside. Descending more vertical steps and standing looking up, straight up, at the ineffable half smile, the Buddha was gazing west across the river commanding the dragons in the river to remain calm and civil. That evening we arrived at the foot of Emei Mountain and during dinner were warned about the hordes of monkeys awaiting us the next day on our visit to Hua Zang Temple. No red clothing, no hanging straps, no feeding the monkeys and if accosted, no repulsing the monkeys. Evidently there were park rangers to do that. The next morning we waited in line for 45 minutes with about a thousand other tourists (all Chinese) to board another tram line up to the Temple. Another trip up into the clouds, walking upwards through the lush forests of Emeishan a temple bell tolled deeply up ahead in the mist. As we reached the Temple the heavens opened up and it rained as hard as I have ever seen. One of our members said that in Kentucky they called this kind of downpour, "a real frog choker"!

Water streamed off the temples, rushing down the mountain. Indeed, on the way back down I saw a drowned frog, but not a single monkey. In vain we trekked up Monkey Mt., again no monkeys only the jade green forest and clear rushing waters. A 3 hour bus ride back to Chengdu: some sleeping, others in long conversations, Stephanie, Ning, Erwin and I misbehaving in the back of the bus.

Our flight the next day to Chongqing was miraculously on time. Chongqing, along with Wuhan and Nanjing is called one of the three furnaces of China; well deserved for it was wicked hot. Fortunately all our buses were air-conditioned but after another 3 hour bus ride we stepped out into the late afternoon blast furnace to visit the stone carvings at Dazu Baoding. Nothing in the surrounding area prepared us for what awaited. The countryside was rural and non descript, we walked down to the entrance of a small ravine and entered the most fantastic open air assembly of stone figures carved into the limestone cliffs. Dating from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) these carvings had been protected by Premier Zhou Enlai from the rampages of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. One whole hillside was a vast panorama of Buddhist heavens and hells. Legions of bodhisattvas at the top and gangs of demons at the bottom, the display was carved to educate illiterate pilgrims in the wisdom of moral virtues and the consequences of malfeasance. The setting sun

illuminated the scene with a soft light, bringing the carvings to life. One grotto I entered was completely dark. As my eyes adjusted the sun came out from behind a cloud, the grotto began to glow and there, larger than life, sat a dozen bodhisattvas in deep meditation as they had been for the past thousand years. The magic and deep mystery of that moment will be with me forever.

At this point in our adventure we had been on the road for nine days, 5 different hotels, and four flights. So it was with great anticipation that we boarded the Yangtze Angel, our floating home for the next four nights as we cruised down the Yangtze River. A chance to unpack, catch up on hand laundry, dry out the socks, put your feet up and watch the countryside go gliding by. Early morning practices on the deck, lazy afternoons napping and reading, evenings in the disco. Yes, there was a disco onboard and nightly dancing. The second night I left the flashing disco party, walked out on the deck and



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marco@yangfamilytaichi.com

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Dave Barrett
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dave@yangfamilytaichi.com

Horacio Lopez
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horacio@yangfamilytaichi.com

Han Hoong Wang
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han@yangfamilytaichi.com

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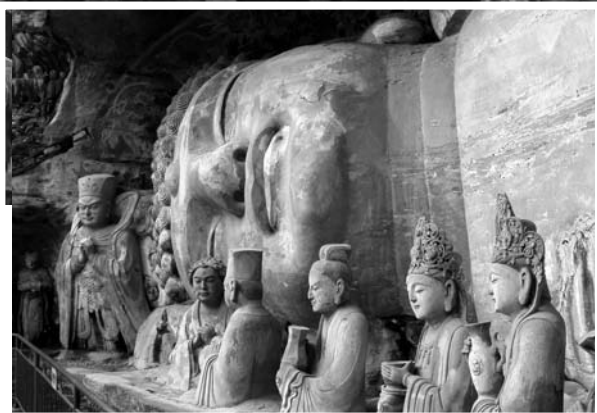
INTERNATIONAL YANG STYLE TAI CHI CHUAN ASSOCIATION

The International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan.

USA
4076 148th Ave NE
Redmond, WA 98052 USA
Phone: 1-(425) 869-1185
CHINA

No. 10 Wu Cheng West Street
Taiyuan, Shanxi P.R.C. 030006
Tel.: 86-351-7042713

EUROPE
Ornstigen 1, 18350 Taby,
Sweden
Tel.: +46-8-201800



spent an hour under the full moon, dead center above the mighty river. The dark countryside was rolling silently by. My thoughts were with Li Bai and all the other poets who have sung of the moon and the river. I could feel the heart of China beating. The next morning waking at 4am to stand on the deck waiting for dawn, I could hear the birds awaken and begin to call to each other across the water. Here the river passed through the mountains, the stars were still out and the full moon had set. Gradually others came up for morning practice as well. Our pace practicing seemed as one with the river and the hills sliding by.

After practice that morning we began to pass through the first two of the Three Gorges: towering green hills on either side of the river sparkling in the morning sun. Truly, this is one of the great scenic journeys in the world. We took a side trip up the Shennong River, leaving the muddy main stem of the Yangtze boarding peapod boats that carried us far upstream until the water was clear and clean enough to drink. The Tuijia boat trackers jumped into the shallows pulling us

up and over some rapids, pulling so hard at times their noses were touching the water. I so wanted to jump out, get soaked and help them pull. But we were the tourists and they the trackers and I probably wouldn't have lasted a minute pulling the boats. In clear waters and under a hot blue sky we turned around, ran the rapids and listened to old love songs the trackers sang as they rowed us back to the docks. It was a demonstration of extraordinary skill and strength, accomplished with rhythm, song and good cheer. That evening we passed through the third Gorge and spent our last night on the boat discoing with the crew.

Wuhan was fiercely hot as well. Before air conditioning the entire populace would bring their bedding out on the streets every summer night to sleep outside. We were given a tour of the Three Gorges Dam, a monumentally audacious project akin to say, building a great wall thousands of miles long to keep the Mongol hordes at bay. Something in the Chinese spirit aspires to massive, earth changing projects and this dam is the most recent of many such endeavors. Wuhan was a favorite spot of

Chairman Mao's; he loved to swim the Yangtze here. We visited his private villa by Lake Dong, put on little plastic shoe covers and walked into history. Mao's villa has been untouched since his death. The paint is peeling, the slipcovers are unchanged. His desk and chair look as though the Great Helmsman will soon return from a swim. His bed still has a crease in the middle. Mao's last wife, the supremely evil Jiang Qing, had her bedroom nearby also untouched, the vanity mirror and hairbrushes at the ready. An old movie projector was set up in another room along with a TV set from the 1960's and a record player. Nothing had been maintained or restored, only lightly dusted. It was a deeply unsettling visit. When asked why the villa was not maintained the guide simply explained that many of the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution were encouraged from this villa, it was not to be touched. Very few groups are allowed to visit.

That afternoon our flight to Beijing was delayed, we barely made our connecting flight to Taiyuan and arrived at the hotel well past midnight for the next day of special events celebrating Master Yang Zhenduo's 80th birthday. This auspicious day began with meeting many international friends who had arrived for the 10 day trip, swelling our ranks to 180. Our small band of 50 intrepid travelers dispersed among the many tables at breakfast, old acquaintances were renewed and new members welcomed.

The first birthday event was the induction of a new group of disciples, formally recognized by the Master as advanced students. In groups of six they stood before Master Yang, received their certificates and bowed deeply three times. It was a solemn yet joyous occasion; many had studied, practiced and worked for over twenty years for this moment. For the first time, there were six non-Chinese disciples inducted, myself among them. All I

can say is that as I bowed to the Master there was a special twinkle in his eyes and a wide smile on his face. My thoughts were with my first taiji teacher, Dr Yuet Sun Chan, gone now for some thirteen years. He had hoped I would find a high level taiji teacher to study with once China opened her doors in the early 1980's. I felt I had done the best I could possibly do in this regard.

In the afternoon we gathered in an arena for a special program of demonstrations honoring Master Yang. For three hours over 25 different performing groups held forth, beginning with a spectacular lion dance troupe. International groups participated as well: the French group sang "La Vie en Rose" and danced as if in a small Parisian café. The Michigan group square danced and the Swedish group amused every one by parading in outlandish costumes and then falling into formation to do taiji. Visiting taiji masters performed as did the best of the best taiji players in the Shanxi Association. The event closed with a rollicking swing dance performance by Bill Walsh and Holly Sweeney, after which the audience was invited onto the floor for a waltz en masse. Master Yang came to the floor, dancing beautifully. Then the music changed to a Brazilian samba, the dancing became freestyle. As Master Yang made his way off the floor he briefly broke into a joyous freestyle boogie. I can only ask you, gentle reader, to imagine what it was like to see him shake his tail feather, to thunderous applause.

The Birthday banquet was a grand affair with over 500 guests. There were numerous toasts and increasingly high spirits due to the liberal application of Fen Jiao, a local distilled concoction clocked at 116 proof. Many people had worked tirelessly and traveled hard to be at this celebration and Master Yang was deeply moved by the proceedings.

The next morning we boarded five buses for a four hour trip deep into the mountains of Shanxi province. The road just kept going up and up impossible grades, with jaw dropping views off the edges. As we climbed higher the air cleared and the mountains sparkled as we descended into the valley of temples known as Wutaishan. Our home for the next four days was a large hotel where we stayed with Master Yang and a handful of his most accomplished disciples. For three mornings the Master taught, assisted by his students and translated by his grandson, Master Yang Jun. In the afternoons we toured the valley visiting so many temples that by the third day many were saying, "What? Not another temple!" Each however was truly unique, ancient and impressive. There were many more steps to climb, bargains to be struck, and pictures to take.

On the last morning of the seminar as Master Yang said goodbye to all of the friends who had come so far to celebrate with him he was obviously and deeply touched. We too, were speechless with gratitude that he had traveled with us, taught us one more time and was now heading back into retirement. To get this opportunity to study with him, to hear the vitality in his voice and feel the deep commitment he has to his art was the high point of the journey. All the scenery, ancient sites, indeed all the tea in China could not compare to the grace and wisdom of our gifted teacher entering his 80th year.

The last two days of the trip were a blur. More interminable bus rides, temples and landmarks, check ins and check outs. As we headed back to Beijing and points homeward, exhausted, exhilarated and finally adventure weary; we carried Master Yang's inexhaustible smile and that special twinkle in his eyes as the most precious gift China could give. ☺



« When I was learning and practicing to enhance my skills, I naturally learned and familiarized myself with my grandfather's teaching methods. »

Taijiquan is a Chinese martial arts treasure with a long history. Each taiji school would hand down family stories regarding the development and continuation of taijiquan from one generation to the next. For Yang style taijiquan, it first began when Yang Luchan became known. Subsequently, Banhou and Jianhou had to train hard to master their skills and with them the form evolved from a small to a middle frame. Later, Yang Chengfu changed the form to a big frame in order to accommodate the circumstances at the time. His actions led Yang style taijiquan to become the most popular form of taijiquan to be practiced. Thereafter, the four brothers, Zhenming, Zhenji, Zhenduo, and Zhenguo continued to develop and promote taijiquan outside of China.

Although it has been almost two hundred years since it's founding, Yang style taijiquan is still going strong after six generations. From my own personal experience, I feel that this is due to each generation's perseverance and effort of in handing down our family skills to the next. When I was very young, I lived with my grandparents. It was not easy for my grandparents to raise me. At that time, my grandfather was in Xinzhou and my grandmother and I were in Huaiyin. I was then not quite three years old. My grandmother not only had to work, but at the same time had to take care of me. As we lived in the mountains, water had to be carried up a pail at a time. Although my grandfather was



MY GRANDFATHER GUIDED ME ON MY JOURNEY TO A LIFE OF TAIJI

By Yang Jun - Translated by Mui Gek Chan

more than a hundred miles away, he would frequently borrow his co-worker's bicycle so that he could visit my grandmother and me during the weekends.

Later, when I was not quite six, I went to live with my grandfather in Xinzhou where he worked. Every morning, my grandfather and his students would practice outdoors. As I usually woke up later, I would get up after my grandfather was finished with his morning practice. However, one day I got up earlier and realized that I was alone. I became frightened as the door to the house was locked and I could not go out. I started to cry out, but no one could hear me. Later, I looked out of the window and saw my grandfather and a group of people practicing martial arts in a distance. I managed to open the window and jumped out to find my grandfather. From then on, because I was afraid to be alone, I pleaded with my grandfather to wake me up before he goes for his morning practice. That marked the beginning of the learning phase of my martial arts career. I still remember the first time I performed taijiquan at my kindergarten's presentation.

My grandfather was strict in disciplining me. As learning martial arts is cumulative and gongfu requires daily training, it was a dull, monotonous affair for a child. Although my grandfather required me to persist in my daily morning practice, it did not

affect my studies during the day. In fact, my grandfather would usually wake me up for morning practice after he was done with his. He would then use that time to prepare his lunch which he brought to work. The winter in northern China is very cold. So, when practicing outdoors, if you do not have a certain level of skill, you would feel the bitter cold piercing through to your hands and feet. The longer you were outside, the more unbearable it would become. The glass windows were often thickly covered with frost so that it was impossible from the inside to see outside. So, when I practiced, I would frequently increase my speed and cut corners in order to finish the tasks my grandfather had assigned me. My grandfather often asked me, "Why is your practice so quick?" I would reply, "I followed your instructions and completed my practice." However, one day while I was practicing outside, my grandfather melted the frost on the window with the warmth of his hand and saw what I was doing. After I finished my slipshod practice session, my grandfather with a grave expression on his face, led me out to redo my practice strictly according to his instructions. From that day onwards, I did not dare to take shortcuts anymore.

Grandfather strongly hoped to have a successor to continue the family's martial arts. While he would supervise and urge me in my practice, he would at the same time enable me to feel the

warmth of taijiquan practitioners as well as the respect people had for him. When I was learning and practicing to enhance my skills, I naturally learned and familiarized myself with my grandfather's teaching methods. As I started to accompany my grandfather on domestic teaching trips and later, overseas trips as well, my life and taijiquan became tightly intertwined. In 1982, after suggestions and support from taijiquan enthusiasts, my grandfather founded the Shanxi Province Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association in Taiyuan. When I was in my teens, I was already accompanying my grandfather to Association meetings, and participating in Association competitions and demonstrations. As a result, I was able to nurture my organizing and managerial skills. At the Association, positions I held included member of the board of directors, assistant secretary, chief judge, and vice-president of operations. In competition related positions I held the following posts: judge, assistant chief judge, and chief judge. All these past experiences helped me in the planning, developing, managing, and training aspects of setting up the International Association.

Grandfather is kind and compassionate to people. So, the adoration and respect he receives is not only because of his skills, but more importantly, due to his martial virtue. It is easy for a martial arts practitioner to talk about martial virtue, but difficult to

MY GRANDFATHER GUIDED ME ON MY JOURNEY TO A LIFE OF TAIJI



actually have it. When grandfather was teaching, regardless of whether you are young or old, he would always patiently answer and explain without getting annoyed. Furthermore, he would discuss and explain to you how to practice. He would not put others down in order to elevate himself. In my many years of living and teaching with my grandfather, his speech and manner are deeply imprinted on me. He is my role model whom I try to emulate. He taught me how to deal with situations and how to treat people. In the past few years since I started to teach independently, I have been recognized for my teaching methods and how I treat people.

In 1980, following China's economic reform, my grandfather received repeated invitations by Yang style taijiquan practitioners to travel outside of China to teach. I was then twenty years old when I accompanied grandfather overseas so that he could nurture and train me. From 1990 onwards, both of us traveled to the United States, Canada, Brazil, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, and

Singapore to teach Yang style taijiquan and therefore, laying the foundation to develop Yang style taijiquan internationally. In 1998, with my grandfather's support and overseas taijiquan practitioners' assistance, I founded the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association to promote the organization and development of taijiquan outside of China. It was in Seattle of 1999 when the Association was formally set in motion. That same year, I moved to the United States to further the work of leading the International Association and teaching taijiquan. At the end of 2004, the International Association had developed thirty Yang Chengfu Tai Chi Chuan Centers in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Italy, France, Switzerland, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina with more than two thousand members. The Association also organized and coordinated important taijiquan activities in China. In 2002, when the Shanxi Province Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association celebrated its 20th anniversary in conjunction with the Shanxi Province Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan 2nd International Invitational Competition, the Association was responsible for organizing two hundred and forty-eight international guests. Their exciting performances contributed an international flavor to the event. This set the record for the highest number of international taijiquan friends to participate at a Shanxi Association's sponsored activity. After six years of development, the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association has emerged to be one of the largest organized Yang style taijiquan groups and therefore, is a significant force.

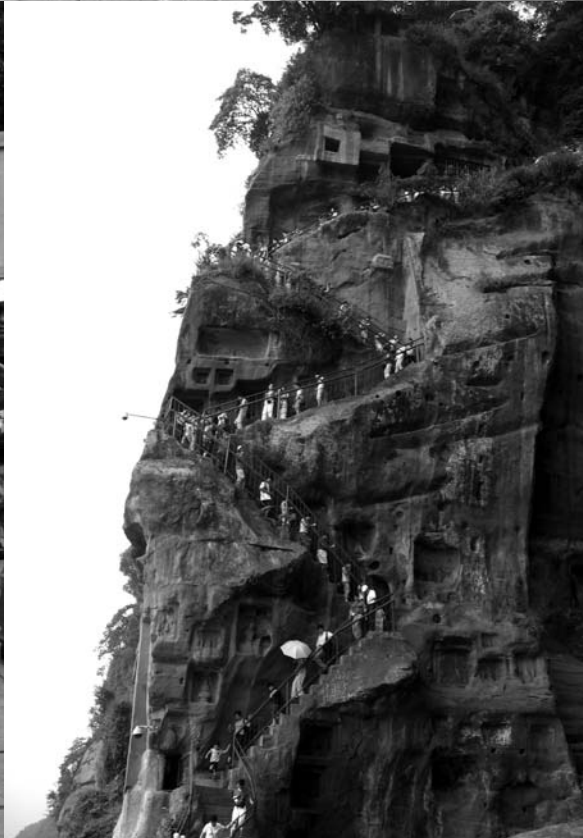
After I moved to the United States, I focused not only on promoting traditional Yang style taijiquan internationally, but also placed an emphasis in developing taijiquan in the Seattle area. In 1999, a month after I come to America, I opened a Yang Chengfu Tai Chi Chuan Center in Seattle's Chinatown. As grandfather and I had not been to Seattle before, most Seattleites were not familiar with traditional Yang style taijiquan. In addition, language was a barrier. It was difficult in the beginning and every month our expenses would exceed the income. However, with the support and assistance from many students and friends, the school is growing stronger. In 2001, the main office of the International Association was moved to Redmond and is less than five hundred meters from the Microsoft headquarters. The Redmond office is my second school in the Greater Seattle area. Today, my school has become a taijiquan school with significant influence. In the summer of 2003, China's Guangdong TV station came for a special interview and the program has already been aired in China.

What made me even happier was that after I settled in the United States, my son was born. Now I have a daughter and a son. My daughter is named Yang Yaning and my son is Yang Yajie. In Chinese the characters for daughter and son combine to form the word "good". I will follow my grandfather's footsteps and use his methods to nurture them and I hope that they will in turn carry on the family's tradition. ☯

China ADVENTURE *in pictures*







CHINA

memory

Françoise Desagnant, Angers, France

In China, what works is considered right and true, what doesn't work is wrong and false. According to this standard, our trip, seminar or whatever adventure we call it that took place in China, starting July 10th and coming to an end Aug. 2nd 2005 came very near to truth and righteousness. This happened this past summer, a moment we usually call holiday or vacation : when most of us took a break from our jobs, dedicating these 22 days to renewing ourselves and trying to find the best way to do so in order that, in the end, one feels re-nourished, re-unified and essentially reconciled with the universe. Starting in Shanghai, through Huangshan, Chengdu, Emeishan, Chongking, the Three Gorges and Taiyuan to reach the pinnacle in Wutaishan and the Thousand Temples, thanks to the Yang family we have experienced an unforgettable collection of extraordinary moments: Tai Chi Chuan can be played anywhere... sure...but what about at the deep

bottom of a huge lock on the Yangtze River, at 5.45 a.m. when you can't find your way or see your tiptoes in the mist? Or on the wet terrace at Yellow Mountain, between the Welcome Pine and the Farewell Pine, a few minutes after the hazy sunrise; or in the very heart of an awakening city, a few yards off from another old disciple of Yang Chengfu's. What about taking the ranking test at the bottom of a hotel swimming-pool (yes, it was empty!)? Being nourished, raised: that is the double meaning of Yang and that is what we experienced, in circumstances forever etched in our minds and bodies, when and where the link between human beings was re-instated, between ourselves and the world. A new fresh balance creating harmony between our three components: vital, moral and cerebral. During these three weeks I let the essence of my life lead me without resistance, not asking why..., where to..., only being what I was, right where I was ; in China! ☺

Anne Buchanan, Michigan, USA

TAI CHI JOURNEY

As we travelled through the vast expanse of China, everything we saw was a picture postcard. I have many fond memories- tai chi in the different parks, holding the red panda, feeling the sense of ancient history as you pass through the villages, temples and cave carvings that are thousands of years old. Most importantly was the spirit of the tai chi family. The bond of being closely connected to people and sharing experiences as we travelled. Doing tai chi together in the mountains, walking through the mists of Huangshan. The mists of the mountain have an ethereal effect as they ebb and flow causing the landscape to change moment by moment. The beauty of the mountain is awe-inspiring as you wander the seemingly endless carved stone steps. The cool wind blows through you, making your spirit soar freely. The pine trees beckon to you from their perches on the sides of the cliffs. We gathered in the early

morning dark and howling wind to watch the sunrise and greet the day. It was inspiring to lean up against the mountain and see the world open up before you. To feel the meaning of the tai chi phrase "stand like a mountain." This is one of my favorite memories of many.

Susan Smith, Michigan, USA

THE TUIJIA PEOPLE

I would love to share an experience from the last full day of our cruise on the "Yangtze Angel," a five-star boat by Chinese standards and our home for four days. The cruise itself was a well-timed change of pace in that we were able to keep our luggage in one place for a few days! Traveling through the Three Gorges was a stunning experience; we were practicing our morning tai chi with Yang Jun as the announcement came over the loudspeaker that we were about to enter the first of the gorges.

It was that last day, however, that was most special for me. We disembarked from the Angel and took a ferry up a tributary of the Yangtze for almost an hour. Then our group disembarked again to fill three "pea pod" boats (about 15 people per boat) in order to journey further up the tributary. The Tujia ("earth family" literally) people live in that area, which is a part of Hubei province. The Tujia are one of China's many national minorities and have lived in that mountainous river area for over a thousand years. Tujia men were the crew on the pea pod boats. Maybe the change in water color gives a better idea of our progression: the Yangtze is a thick opaque reddish mud; once we turned into the tributary on the ferry the water changed to a thick green color. Then, most amazingly, once we got on the small boat the water became crystal clear with beautiful multi-colored rocks on the bottom.

We first went upstream and there were rapids so our crew hopped out, letting out long ropes lines and proceeded to PULL us through channels in the stream that had been made by lining up these colored rocks in straight rows. The ride back to the ferry was fast and fun!

Our beautiful guide and the rowers sang Tujia love songs to us after we ran the rapids. The crew gathered some of the colorful stones from the river bottom and passed them around the boat. I have several in a dish by my kitchen sink so that the Tujia people are never far away.

Jo Anne Sellars, New Jersey, USA

WE CAME, WE SAW, OUR HEARTS WERE CONQUERED

We came to China from all over the world to participate in The China Adventure 2005 and the Birthday Event for Grand Master Yang Zhenduo.

We traveled by plane, bus and boat from one Chinese treasure to another.

We ate noodles where noodles are famous, dumplings where dumplings are famous, spicy food in Szechwan of course, and vegetarian on Wutai Mountain.

We renewed old friends and made new ones.

We climbed endless stairs to fantastic places and thrilled when the fog lifted on Yi Ling Peak to reveal the magnificent granite cliffs of Huang Shan and bravely awakened at 3:00 a.m. or so to watch the sun rise and then practice our Tai Chi in the mountain air.

We floated down the Yangtze River amidst the awesome gorges which will soon be inundated with water forever and listened to the songs of the Tujia boat trackers as they pulled our peapod

boats through the shallow, clear Shennong Stream.

We played Tai Chi on boats, in driveways and in parks throughout China and were honored by the instruction given us by Grandmaster Yang Zhenduo and Master Yang Jun.

We played games and danced with our Tai Chi friends and new Chinese friends aboard the good ship Yangtze Angel.

We celebrated Yang Zhenduo's 80th birthday with great joy on a day beginning with the naming of new disciples, several of which, for the first time, were non-Chinese. We were treated along with the master, to folk dances and performances from various regions. There were tai chi and martial arts demonstrations including a "knock'em dead" performance by a group of very young martial artists and ending with a social dance time initiated by the salsa and swing dance performances of Helen and Sergio, Bill and Holly.

We ended the evening with a grand banquet, fen wine, a nine layer birthday cake and more entertainment with Yang Zhenduo and his wife holding court humbly and elegantly. It was a more than well-deserved showing of respect for a real Chinese National Treasure.

We talked into nights about our love of tai chi and what we had learned and were still learning, sharing our thoughts, hopes, dreams, concerns and cares.

We laughed a lot.

We slept little.

We shopped ceaselessly.

We bargained always.

We bought many souvenirs.

We became family.

We experienced an adventure none of us will forget.

Thank you Yang Jun, Fang Hong, and all of those who helped to make it all possible.

Jorge Catino, Sao Paolo, Brazil

MY
GRANDDAUGHTER
WAS BORN THIS
SUMMER ON JULY
19TH!

Where was I at that moment? -- Beginning to ride the Yangtze River, a magnificent episode on the grand trip that was our China Adventure 2005. I remember that I made a toast that night for the success of Alice's birth. Maybe, some day she'll ask me why I was so far away from her: I know what I'll answer.

"Dear Alice, that journey was so rich, so full of learning and kindness. I was surrounded by very special people : Grand Master Yang Zhenduo, Yang Jun's entire family, all my fellow travellers and all the very kind Chinese people around us. Today I can say I am better than before, reflected in that company.

That journey help me to strengthen my beliefs, and my knowledge of the art. To be with all those people, visiting the historical and holy places was an unforgettable experience, renewing my best feelings. Travelling without them, would be a pity. We walked always with harmony, sometimes climbing unending steps, or waiting to take a plane, or moving in buses, or admiring paintings, sculptures, buildings, temples, talking many languages, tasting a thousand strong or delicate plates, admiring natural or handcrafted beauties, always I was in the best company, everybody smiley, joking, all the time was a good time.

So, Alice, now we can enjoy the thousand stories of that Journey to the East, and you are going to see what I believe: there are more, good people than bad people in the world. It's just that good people don't like to make publicity. Fellow Travellers, I miss you all!

Han Hoong Wang, Michigan, USA

I had great time for 21 days on our trip. The group was warm and caring just like sisters and brothers. I am satisfied to have seen so many old and rich cultural places. The best part of my trip was to have Grandmaster Yang Zhenduo teach the seminar for us. He has all the energy to teach 3 hours each morning for 3 days. I was so happy that Master Yang wanted to teach the seminar for us. We are so lucky to have received his teaching on his 80th birthday.

His movements were elegant and powerful. I have listened to his lecture many times in the past. When I listened again I felt so fresh and excited. The seminar hours were past too fast, no one needed a break. Grandmaster Yang got up very early each morning and he walked to a practice group and taught a small seminar again! I was so lucky to receive corrections from him again!

Gary Lee Grand Rapids, MI

EXPECT THE
UNEXPECTED

Although this bromide could apply to any trip, it seemed especially apt to me on this one. My first trip to China was '02, so I had a limited basis on which to form expectations. But this is how it struck me.

First, one aspect that was the same: China in July is hot and humid, so be prepared (kind of like the Deep South here in the U.S.A. in July). Now, some miscellaneous contrasts: In '02 I had severe jet lag for several days after I arrived in China; this time, no jet lag at all. At our morning taiji practices we spent quite a bit of time doing push hands, which was a pleasant surprise. The beds seemed harder ("firmer" is too weak a word) than I remembered. I bought far less stuff than on my first trip. I felt that I saw much more of

China this time, but I took far fewer pictures. I was less nervous about testing, though less confident I would do well. I missed the many friends who did not come on this trip, especially my big brother Paul, whose humor knows no bounds. I got to play cards on this trip (euchre, with several good players, and the excellent Phyllis), but no ping pong. Two of our local Taiyuan guides last time, Sunny and Wei, are now national guides, so for the whole three weeks we had the pleasure of their assistance (Sunny's unique blend of charm and assertiveness seemed to work magic at times). Near the end of the '02 trip I was looking forward to coming home; this time, I didn't want to leave China. And I can't wait to go back, despite the severe jet lag I had upon my return.

Shanghai: our first day trip was to Zhouzhang. We were cautioned about getting lost in this interesting labyrinth of a village, so I dutifully found my way to a meeting place from which I could follow a group back to the bus. Four of us set out, and after awhile we realized we were lost. We met Sergio wandering around, but he couldn't help us any more than we could help him. We kept asking directions, and we kept getting lost. Finally we found the exit, and were greeted by the 45 others we had kept waiting for nearly half an hour; so much for my pride in being punctual.

Even worse was the next day. I had always wanted to see the Shanghai Museum, so when we passed right by it on the way to a silk factory, I (with two friends) decided to sneak away from the tour for a few hours. Since we were flying out of Shanghai later that afternoon, we found out the name of the hotel where we had to meet up with the group at 4:30 to go to the airport. The museum lived up to its reputation, but we were disciplined (or fearful?) enough that we arrived at the rendezvous by 4. However, no one was there--not even the buses. So we walked around to try to find someone from our group, and we

did, but then we left them to wander around for a few more minutes by ourselves. When we got back to the hotel at 4:30, still no one was there, still no buses. So I went back out to look around, saying to my companions, "I'll be back in a minute." After walking a block or so, I was hailed by a Chinese couple, who had earlier met our group. They said I was very late and needed to go several blocks farther on (away from the hotel) to catch up with the group. So I started running. Ten minutes later the same couple found me looking around vainly. They were almost as distraught as I was. It started to rain as I ran back to the hotel, breathless from both effort (I gave up jogging long ago) and fear (what would I do if no one was there? how would I get to the airport? what if I missed the plane?)--and was greeted by a relieved Han, Susan, and Sunny. For the second day in a row, the guy who was never late was late, holding up 50 people who had a plane to catch. Once again (and for the rest of the trip), I had to endure good-natured derision from my companions.

Huangshan: though I had heard of its beauty, it must be seen to be believed. Despite the mist/fog/clouds as we went up in the cable cars, the sun broke through near the top to reveal the stunning mountains. To find fresh ground coffee at the hotel there brought smiles to many faces. They even had Internet access; after waiting an hour, I finally paid my fee, got online--and five minutes later we had to leave, so I was able only to send a short message to my sons.

Tun Xi: I was not looking forward to visiting an ink factory, but a master ink maker (and showman) was amazing. On one bus ride we all had fun giving language lessons to our local guide.

Chengdu: two blocks from our hotel in this ancient capital I found a street mall that would rival any mall in the U.S. A bicyclist, perhaps in his teens or twenties, was stopped by a

woman (an official of some kind)--no bikes allowed on the street mall--and to my amazement, rather than arguing or copping an attitude, he was obviously chagrined at his error; he hung his head, apologized, turned around, and walked his bike back to the street. The next day, rather than going to see the pandas, I chose to spend some time with my teacher, Han, and Dave B., sweating in an upstairs lobby going through the 49 form time after time.

Emeishan: only the monkeys had enough sense not to go out in the rain. By the time we walked back down the mountain, the rain was subsiding, and we could appreciate many beautiful vistas of waterfalls cascading down the mountainsides.

Chongqing: our guide informed us that this was the largest municipality in China both in area and population (32 million; Beijing has only 30 million). This was our jumping off point to the Yangtze River. I had never taken a cruise before; despite its age and belches of black smoke, our cruise ship "Yangtze Angel" was a pleasant surprise. Most pleasant was Lu Xiaofeng, a young woman whose silk embroidery was as beautiful as she.

My first time in China I escaped illness; this time for about half the trip I had what someone called "Mao's revenge." At first I was confident that the standard Western medicine would cure me; it worked well for others. But after a few days of trying that, I heard from several folks about the traditional Chinese cure--this worked for everyone, I was told. So I tried that for several days, to no avail. Then I heard that the tea lady on the boat had a concoction that worked for some with just one cup. After two days I gave up on that. A few days later I was fine. So maybe it all worked--just not in the way I expected. I also thought a massage might help, and on the boat they offered 45 minutes working the feet and 45 minutes working the rest of the body. Sounds great! But the scalding water failed to relax my feet (though the masseuse seemed

to enjoy my reactions), and I spent the rest of the time hoping I'd be able to walk again.

The Yangtze was muddy, appearing narrower than I expected, perhaps because of the surrounding mountains, which are especially beautiful in the Three Gorges. I almost skipped the side trip down a tributary, past the hanging coffins, to the little river where we got into sampans for a memorable upstream journey. We sat under a canopy, sweating in the high heat and humidity, while 4-5 men strained against the current with their paddles till the water became so shallow they had to get out and pull the boat with ropes over the thousands of small rocks; then we turned around and they sang folk songs on the way back. I finally saw one drop of sweat on one of them as we neared the end.

The saddest part of the trip came as we were on the bus to the Three Gorges Dam. We got a call on Yang Jun's cell phone telling us that the rest of the Michigan group (12 people), who had booked the shorter trip, had not been allowed to board at the airport because the date on the visa was incorrect. Despite the best efforts of everyone on both ends over the next 24 hours, no one could figure a way to make all the necessary changes in travel on such short notice, so our friends ended up not being able to come at all.

Wuhan: after visiting Yellow Crane Tower, I was ready to skip the tea shop, but I saw it was air-conditioned so I went in for momentary relief. The young man who told us about tea was so knowledgeable and enthusiastic that I enjoyed his talk, whereas in the past similar talks had seemed tedious. I even bought some tea. That evening, my taiji sisters Han, Martine, and Suzanne convinced (forced) me to go shopping (for two hours) so I would look presentable for Master Yang's birthday celebration. They know how much I appreciate their patience, taste, and good humor.

CHINA memory

Taiyuan: the birthday celebration was a day-long event; several masters were there to honor Master Yang with speeches in the morning at the disciples' ceremony, performances in the afternoon, and a banquet in the evening. At the disciples' ceremony, I was surprised to see my friend Glenda, who had been in Taiyuan for three months, running around serving as translator for whoever needed it. Of the many beautiful and entertaining performances, the group from Sweden, whose antics as beginning students, dressed in stunning attire, was a crowd favorite. And, after hours of practice in Michigan, at airports, and on the boat, the Michigan group performed a square dance, which I enjoyed despite myself.

Wutaishan: every morning Master Yang Zhenduo taught us for three hours--a real treat. I found out two days before we got there that for the Ranking examination, we would have the written test the evening of our arrival, and the forms test the next evening. Many of us decided to forgo sightseeing so we could practice. When I finally put on my silk uniform, I found that the elastic in the waistband was barely elastic, so I had to push out my stomach instead of trying to hold it in, just to keep my pants up. Again, my taiji sisters Cathy and Marion came to the rescue with safety pins. But the pins were so small (and my waist so big) that I kept popping them off. Fortunately, the pins held well enough to keep my pants up during my tests.

By the time I went for my first test (sword), it was so dark I could hardly see the judges, and I thought this might work in my favor--it meant they could hardly see me! Alas, they really couldn't see us, so we had to do the test over the next day, along with the saber, 103, and 49. To make sure that they got all the testing done, they scheduled it for the afternoon. And to ensure that none of us fainted under that hot sun, they moved it indoors--to the swimming pool (which had been empty for years, I think). Nobody drowned; though I was sweating enough I might as well have been swimming. My thanks to all the judges and the rest of the staff, who were generous and gracious under less than optimal conditions. Congratulations to all those who tested!

The next day, as we were waiting outside a temple complex, I sat down and looked off to my left, half listening to the guide and half just watching the people. I felt something on my right leg, and as I turned, I saw a monk next to me, curiously stroking the hair on my leg with his finger. Since he was interested in this modest bit of hair, I called over my friend Robert, whose bushy beard seems to fascinate many in China.

Hanging Temple: one of the most famous sites in China, and not to be missed, though the narrow walkways, with knee-high outside railings and low overhanging roofs, had me hugging the walls in a few spots.

Datong: a few of us decided to do a little shopping rather than visit another temple, but after a bus ride across town to the only bank there that could exchange money for us (which took an hour), we hardly had any time to shop. Across the street from the bank was a beautiful new hotel, which we all wished would be our hotel (we found out later that it was). We took a cab back across town, spent a few minutes in a couple of stores, then rushed back to the bus as the rain started (again). But the big red arch I so confidently used to mark the street near where the bus was parked turned out to be inflatable, and they had taken it down. So we went a few blocks too far, then finally backtracked and found the bus--we weren't even the last ones to arrive. That night a few of us ordered drinks as we sat down for our euchre game. Marion ordered "fresh lemon juice," thinking, naturally, of lemonade. When it finally arrived half an hour later, she winced as she took her first sip: it was indeed lemon juice, fresh squeezed, but just that--no water, no ice, no sugar. I couldn't believe she drank the whole thing.

The long ride back to Beijing featured a double rainbow arcing right across the road in front of us for at least half an hour. A final thanks to all my old friends and new friends who made this trip so memorable, especially to Master Yang Jun and Fang Hong, who did so much every day for all of us, and to Han Hoong Wang, without whom I would not have been there.



2006 SEMINARS

Hand Form Jan 14-15, 2006
Saber Form Jan 17, 2006
STOCKTON CA
Contact: Dr. Raymond Tom
Ph:(209) 952-8582
ray@yangfamilytaichi.com

49 Hand Form Feb 18-19, 2006
EAST BRUNSWICK NJ
Contact: Andy Lee
leeandy@yangfamilytaichi.com

Hand Form March 11-12, 2006
MANCHESTER NH
Contact: Michael Coulon
(603) 623-2371
michael@yangfamilytaichi.com

Hand Form April 1-2, 2006
O'FALLON IL
Contact: LeRoy Alsup
618) 622-0547 or
Cell:(618) 719-9638
lalsup2@charter.net

Hand Form June 24-26, 2006
Saber Form June 27-28, 2006
LOUISVILLE KENTUCKY
Contact: William Wojasinski or
Carl Meeks
william@yangfamilytaichi.com or
carl@yangfamilytaichi.com

Hand Form July 15-16, 2006
Sword Form July 17-19, 2006
MONTREAL CANADA
Contact: Sergio Arione
Tel: (514) 684-9584

Fax (514) 684-8291
Toll free in North America :
(888) 548-2454
sergio@yangfamilytaichi.com

Hand Form August 4-7, 2006
Saber Form August 8-9, 2006
New York City NY
Contact: Bill Walsh
Tel:(845) 225-0662
Fax (845) 225-5350
bill@yangfamilytaichi.com

Hand Form August 18-20, 2006
Sword Form August 21-23, 2006
Troy MI
Contact: Han Hoong Wang
Tel:(248) 680-8938
han@yangfamilytaichi.com

TAIJI IN TAIYUAN



Glenda Liu Quarnstrom

Although most people in China learn taiji by showing up the park in the morning and following along with a group, Yao Laoshi's students taught a more formal class on the 49 form in ten, one-hour sessions over the space of two weeks. As I listened to Guo Xiaofang calling out the moves, it occurred to me that I had done the same thing, only in English, in a class with Gary Lee at Grand Valley State in Michigan the previous month. However, whereas Gary taught 25 students all by himself, Guo Laoshi had at least five assistants for a class of 11 students. While one of them stood in front for us to follow, the rest went around making corrections. Although the class formally ended at 8:00, most of the students stayed for an additional half hour. In this way, they were able to learn the entire form in a relatively short time. In Gary's class, as well as those I have taken with Han Hoong Wang in Detroit, we begin by standing. I have never done this in a class in China; however, most students there arrive for class early and stretch.

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I had private lessons with Yao Laoshi in the park in the afternoons. It was not unusual for people to watch me work through the moves, sometimes offering suggestions of their own. One afternoon, rain forced us to move to the awning of the park office. I had the added challenge of not hitting the wall or decapitating others also seeking shelter from the elements. Another afternoon, I struggled to focus as the Eagles' "Hotel California" blasted over the sound system.

Yao Laoshi would begin my lessons by explaining the move, and then watching me do it until she was satisfied I understood. Next, she would leave me to do the move on my own, over and over. When my mind wandered and I lapsed into old bad habits, I would be jolted back by a sharp "NO," the only word she knows in English. "Ni bu ting!" ("You aren't listening"). Conversely, a move executed correctly, would engender, "ting haole," you listened well. She was reluctant to let me practice when she was not there to watch, saying, "when my back is turned, you make mistakes." Whenever I became frustrated, Yao Laoshi would tell me to

write in my notebook or get a drink of water. One particularly humid afternoon, I was tired and having a difficult time grasping "push and block up left and right." Just as I was about to throw down my sword in frustration, my friend, Ho Yuhua came running up with ice cream bars. After that, Ho would bring her sword and practice with me. Over the course of the next few weeks, I think I must have tried every variety of ice cream bar sold in the park.

As I did in the summer of 2004, I also practiced with Yao Laoshi's students as they prepared for their competition. In general, Yao Laoshi was more relaxed working with her advanced students and they had a rather lively discussion on what to do with the saber hand coming out of Hit Tiger Right. We often stayed until after the lights were turned out in the park, but it paid off because they came in first, as they always do. During one of the practices, Guo Xuling, who has won many competitions, told me to "fang song (relax)." When I replied I was having difficulty grasping this concept, he said "man man de (take it slowly)." By this he meant not only to execute the moves slowly, but also, to resist the inclination to expect instantaneous results.

One Sunday morning in Yingzi Park, Yao Laoshi allowed me to be part of a group of twelve students who performed the sword for Master Yang Zhendou. After we finished, he worked with us row by row on "little dipper." Watching Master Yang teach in Wutaishan was interesting for me. More relaxed than he was teaching in Taiyuan, he made use of facial expressions and negative examples, "like

this? Nooo.” Perhaps he has adopted this innovative approach as a way to overcome the language barrier. However, he needs no translator to convey the joy he feels teaching. Andy Lee, who has been a student of Master Yang for many years, told me that he has always treated her like a daughter, expressing concern that she get enough sleep and not skip meals. He affectionately calls Yao Laoshi, “Junmei (little sister).”

Another Sunday morning, I watched Duan Yinglian, a 73 year old disciple of Master Yang, work with a small group of students. Eventually she came to me and said, “show me how you ‘song qua’ (relax your qua).” I did not even make it through “grasp the bird’s tail” when she shook her head and said “zhen bu xing.” “Really terrible,” a comment she repeated frequently to the others as well. To emphasize her point, she would periodically throw up her hands in disgust. But then, she touched a point on my elbow, immediately releasing a flood of blocked energy. After an hour or so, she abruptly walked away,

signaling the end of the session. As she did so, she turned back to me, flashed a smile, her eyes dancing, and said “I am glad you came back.”

At Wutaishan, I practiced cloud hands as I waited in the hotel lobby for my turn to test. One of the French teachers saw me, and using exaggerated gestures indicated I should follow my hands with my eyes. I realized I had received the same correction in Chinese from Yao Laoshi and in English from Gary. I passed the test thanks to all I have learned from Yao Laoshi, her students, Duan Laoshi as well as from the classes I have taken with Han Hoon Wang in Detroit. It was Gary Lee, who first taught me to “grasp the bird’s tail,” and continues to inspire me with his dedication to taiji and teaching. He challenges me to demand perfection of myself and allows me space to work through my bouts of “post modernist” self-doubt whenever I fall short. Without his prodding, encouragement and support, I would not have had my experiences in China. ☺



www.yangfamilytaichi.com



**INTERNATIONAL YANG STYLE
TAI CHI CHUAN ASSOCIATION**
4076 148th Ave NE
Redmond, WA 98052 USA