

國際楊氏太極拳協會

Tai Chi Chuan

Number 18 • Winter 2006



百丈極拳事業的
發展和人類健康
長壽做出貢獻

楊軍長撰 曾志

祖述楊派 師承正宗 西曆一九八〇年



The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

Dedicated to the work of developing taijiquan and contributing to the health and longevity of mankind.

Yang Zhen Duo



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Yang Jun, President

Translated by Wendy Wong

From my perspective, the year 2005 brought an unforgettable summer where we celebrated my grandfather's 80th birthday in Taiyuan. Representatives from various Taijiquan schools came to celebrate and to commemorate this special occasion. The celebration was the culmination of the planning, work and performances of nearly a thousand people. This affirms my grandfather's many years of spreading the teachings of Taijiquan and receiving the acceptance of the public. Once again, on behalf of my grandfather, I extend my deepest gratitude to all the International Association Center Directors and members for their hard work and support. The China Central Committee Television (CCTV) came and recorded a special piece for the occasion which was then broadcast nationally.

After the Taiyuan celebration, we arranged for all the overseas guests to visit Wutai Mountain. July in

China is the hottest month and Wutai Mountain provided a refreshing coolness during the hot summer. The most unforgettable moment during this trip was my grandfather's teaching. He has been gradually retiring from teaching since 2002. He does not normally teach and only provides pointers on the side. My grandfather was greatly touched when he saw many friends from everywhere, be it from China or overseas, who came to celebrate with him. Therefore, he decided to teach at Wutai Mountain and allowed me to translate for him. This moved the guests greatly and made them feel extremely honored.

In December, my grandfather and I attended the second World Taijiquan Health Conference which was held in Haikou City in Hainan province. The conference was organized by the Chinese Wushu Management Center and the Chinese Wushu Association. There were nearly 2000 participants at the conference, among them famous Taijiquan experts of the traditional five main Schools, as well as the Henan Zao Bao School, the simplified Taijiquan School, and the competition committee. Many performances were given by the Taijiquan experts. My grandfather and I also gave performances and consultations. Since the World Taijiquan Health Conference will be held annually in different cities, I think that it is beneficial to participate in this conference as one can observe different performances from different Taijiquan schools and hear the guidance of famous Taijiquan experts.

With the New Year, I have completed my second DVD: Traditional Yang Style Hand Form, 49 Form, Sword and Saber demonstrations. I hope this DVD can provide a better reference for the study and practice of the Traditional Yang Style Taijiquan. Next year I plan to produce instructional DVDs of the Yang Style Taijiquan Push Hand as well as the Sword and Saber Forms. With these DVDs, I will have then completed the Yang Style Taijiquan DVD series.

In September 2006, the three brothers, Yang Zhenji, Yang, Zhenduo and Yang Zhenguo will hold a commemorative ceremony to mark the 70th anniversary of the passing of Great Grandmaster Yang Chengfu at Handan, China. I have an exciting announcement: the China Cultural Relics Preservation Agency has granted accreditation to the Yang Family ancestral grave. The Yong Nian county government and the Yang Family have decided to move the ancestral gravesite to a more spacious location and to construct a memorial site. The government has now started to select a location and the design work has begun for the memorial site. The ground breaking ceremony may be held in September 2006. The International Association will coordinate this activity and I hope all the members will participate in this event as much as possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank all members for their support and I wish everybody a peaceful, healthy and prosperous New Year!

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Hand Form April 15-17, 2006
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 Saber Form August 8-9, 2006
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80TH BIRTHDAY INTERVIEW WITH MASTER YANG ZHENDUO

*Conducted at Wutaishan, China
by Dave Barrett
and translated by Jeremy Blodgett*

DB: *I wanted to start by wishing you a happy 80th birthday.*

YZD: Thank you!

DB: *At this point it is natural to look back over one's life. I'd also like to ask you about what you are looking forward to. What interests you now in your practice? What do you find exciting now about taijiquan, looking ahead?*

YZD: Now I'm 80 years old. In China it's not easy to reach this age. There's an old saying that it's rare to reach 70. Now the living conditions are better, and people live longer. Now maybe most people can reach 80. Of course once you reach 80 it has been a long process to get there. This is worth remembering.

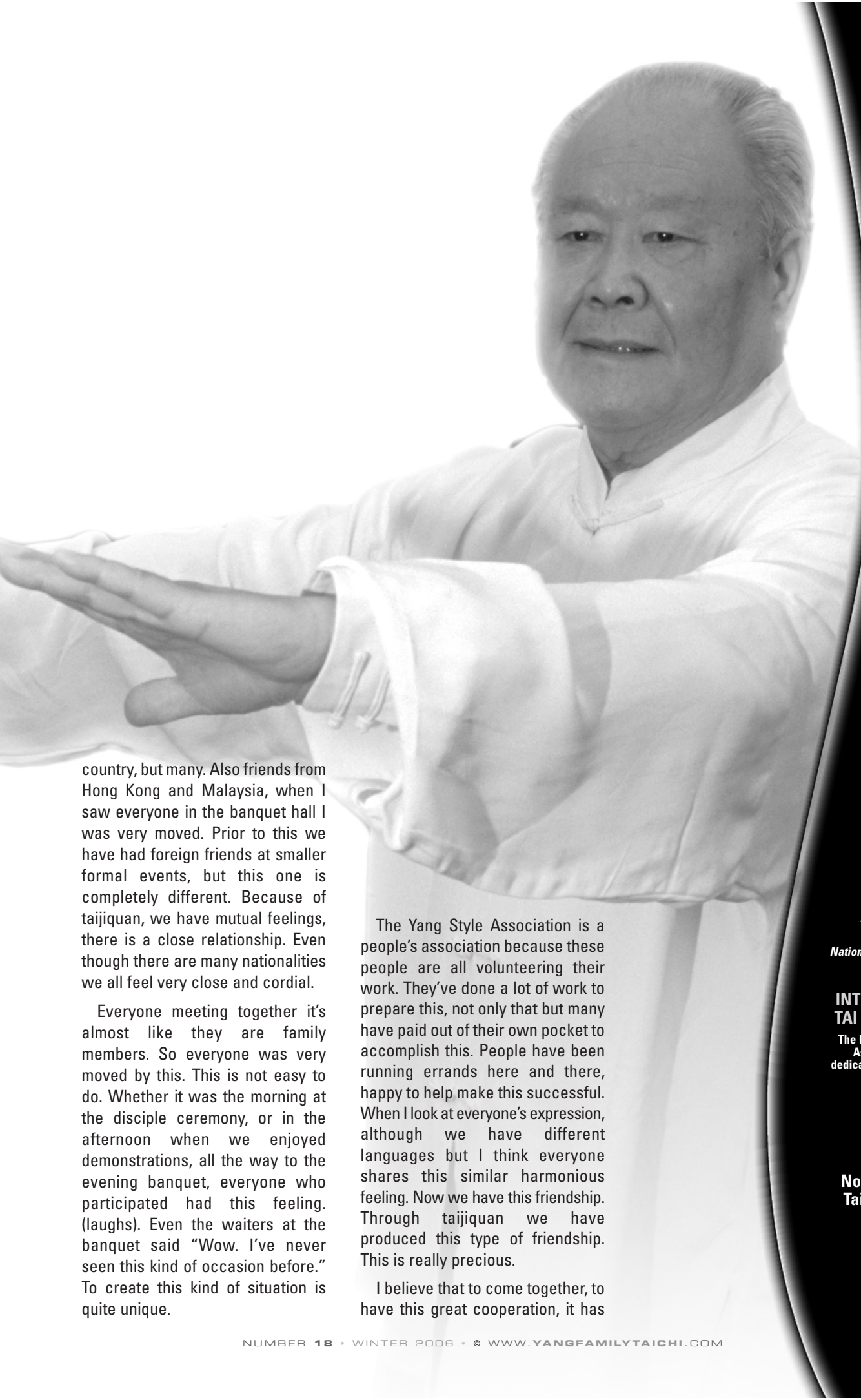
I started teaching in 1960, from there to now although it's not really a long time still it is some 40 years. I began teaching in China, and then gradually went abroad. This is the history of it. If I look back on the past, these 40 years have not been that easy.

Yang Style has been developing steadily, beginning with Yang Lu Chan, my great grandfather to my

grandfather and then Yang Chengfu, my father. These three generations worked very hard. Now taijiquan is well received by everyone for helping to improve health, especially after the government attached importance to it by using my father's form as the basis for the simplified 24 form. Then there was the 88 form and various competition forms that also utilized our style. These other forms became widely popularized so more and more people now practice taijiquan. Consequently, more people have become interested in studying our traditional form.

Traditional Yang Style has benefited greatly from this organized support. Every year I have seen it develop and now the situation is quite good. As we have moved abroad, the response also has been very positive. People have been very pleased and the international advance of Traditional Yang Style has been steadily progressing. Now Yang Jun is abroad working to spread the Association. Gradually more people are studying the traditional form and so in general

things are very good. Although the first three generations of the Yang Family earned a reputation in China, because of the circumstances they were not able to spread it abroad. In my generation we had four brothers with the eldest, Yang Shouzhong settling in Hong Kong. Although he taught in countries in Se. Asia, he did not have that much contact with other countries. So it was mainly I, with Yang Jun, who worked to help spread Traditional Yang Style to Se. Asia, Europe, America and South America. So for me personally it was some work to expand from the domestic to the international. This development has really been made possible through people's support, without this our undertaking would not have been successful. For example, this time I'm 80 years old. It could be just an ordinary celebration, but of course it's a special date and to attract so many people from different countries, who have come so far, is exceedingly rare. I'm very moved. I'm also very excited by it. It's rare to have this atmosphere. I'm very happy. Ordinarily in China, everyone is Chinese! But here we have foreigners not from just one



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country, but many. Also friends from Hong Kong and Malaysia, when I saw everyone in the banquet hall I was very moved. Prior to this we have had foreign friends at smaller formal events, but this one is completely different. Because of taijiquan, we have mutual feelings, there is a close relationship. Even though there are many nationalities we all feel very close and cordial.

Everyone meeting together it's almost like they are family members. So everyone was very moved by this. This is not easy to do. Whether it was the morning at the disciple ceremony, or in the afternoon when we enjoyed demonstrations, all the way to the evening banquet, everyone who participated had this feeling. (laughs). Even the waiters at the banquet said "Wow. I've never seen this kind of occasion before." To create this kind of situation is quite unique.

The Yang Style Association is a people's association because these people are all volunteering their work. They've done a lot of work to prepare this, not only that but many have paid out of their own pocket to accomplish this. People have been running errands here and there, happy to help make this successful. When I look at everyone's expression, although we have different languages but I think everyone shares this similar harmonious feeling. Now we have this friendship. Through taijiquan we have produced this type of friendship. This is really precious.

I believe that to come together, to have this great cooperation, it has

been because of taijiquan. We have a common dream. What is our dream? Through the activity of taijiquan not only do I find benefit for myself, we can also help others to benefit as well. This is to say, that through my work I can help even more people to become healthy. So from this ideal: we work for others, we have a common goal, this is why we are able to come together and enjoy such good relations. I can appreciate this very deeply. So through this year's activities our cause also has benefited.

With Yang Jun in Seattle forming a base and putting down roots, he has relied on a lot of support from old friends. For Yang Jun to receive this has been very helpful, people have really done a lot. Many of these friends are younger, some are like brothers. Even though Yang Jun is not as experienced perhaps as me, many people have shown support for

his work. All this progress and development has been possible through this friendship and support. So at this time, for myself, I feel there will always be people to carry on the work. I am very happy that he has this help. Looking ahead for me, I'm at a certain age. In the past, administrators retired at 60 and now I've done an additional 20 years with this kind of work. Now I'm getting old and my physical condition is not the same as in the past. Today, I still can do some work. I've taught taijiquan for many years. My body might not get me there, but I still can use my mind to help students to study. I can still do some work in these years to help

people become more healthy and enjoy longer life.

Of course I hope that if I can live to 90, that everyone can come and visit again to celebrate! (laughing) If we can really make it to that day it will be even more meaningful. By then our cause will have shown even more progress. In summary, everything undergoes a process of metabolism. Once you get to a certain age you need to step down and let younger people do it. For me already I'm not teaching much anymore but on this particular occasion, I was very much moved by so many people coming from so far. I was really happy to see the students together and decided that I can still help them study. I may not be able to perform quite as well, but I can still help them improve. I'm very much honored to have everyone together. We've had the CCTV and another national television station out here. (chuckling) This is very rare to get this national exposure. Everyone has been so pleased, especially me.

Tomorrow we will go our separate ways. We've really had some fun together. In China when we part we always say 'may you have a pleasant journey. May your family be happy, may 10,000 things go your way.' So I'll just say this.

DB: *Today in class you mentioned that some people seemed very serious when they practiced. You mentioned that some faces were grim and their motions tight. How can we make our practice more natural, more comfortable, more relaxed?*

YZD: It's hard to avoid, in general. This process though is gradual. We have a requirement that you should be natural. Of course one aspect is physical and the other mental. It's simply relaxation (fang song) and when you relax, you become more natural. So don't be too tense. Don't think that practicing that taijiquan is

so difficult. As in anything, you should have the belief that if I practice, if I persevere, I can practice it well.

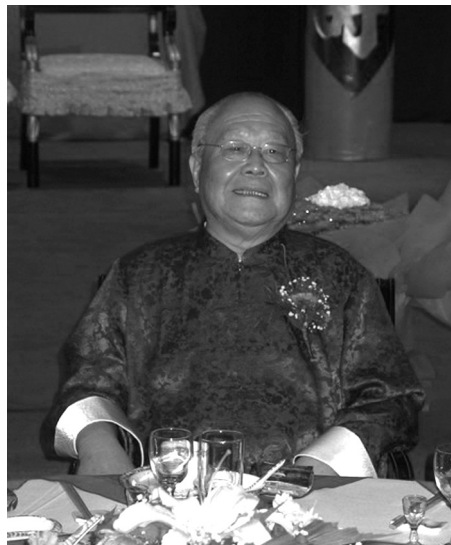
Anything is like this. Continue to practice well, whether it is your mental relaxation or your physical response and gradually you become used to it. Slowly, bit by bit, you will improve.

DB: *I'd like to ask about something perhaps a bit more technical, specifically the requirement of loosening the chest and rounding the back. This concept is difficult, to understand how to move the torso. For example, if the chest is sunken too much of the time it's not right. There seems to be a dynamic of flexing of the torso, sometimes in a natural position, other times dropped inward at the end position. How do we move correctly?*

YZD: It's like this: we say sink the chest and round the back. In fact this is a part of a connected system, an organic whole. It is related to the sinking of the shoulders, dropping of the elbows, sinking the hips. These are all these different parts, almost like a machine.

When you ask if this is active or dynamic we point to the waist as leading the motion. Are these other parts connected as well? If you are missing one, there can be problems, you need them all. These principles are passed from our predecessors; their experiences have given us standard rules and established practices. We must do it according to these rules to avoid taking a detour. So I've said this in China and abroad as well: when you study taijiquan the best method is to take oral instruction and experience it personally.

For example, with the two of us: I can tell you how to do it. If it's not right you can test and correct it in your body. This is the best way. Frequently we aren't able to study in





YZD: So now we have these modern tools. In the past we had VCR tapes and now we've got the DVDs. This is a study tool. Many people use these in China. After we produced these I would frequently go out and

meet many people. They'd say "Master Yang, I know you! Where do I know you from? The DVD!" (laughs) ... They were studying from the DVD. But this kind of studying is similar to learning from a book. Some people can study well in this way. Others have more difficulty understanding. We say that the relaxation of the joints, muscles and ligaments and the extension of the frame are key techniques (fang song, fang kai), but to understand this from the video is perhaps difficult. When you watch the tapes they can help to a certain extent. But, if you are with some people who understand it pretty well, they don't have to be teachers, friends are ok, then this can also be a help. This is perhaps better. If you really don't have these kinds of taiji friends, it's hard to say. Everyone is different. In China we say that everyone has different abilities to understand.

Some people can copy very well and reproduce correctly, others can't necessarily do that. For now when we study something, some can progress quickly, some are not this way. So if you can get 2 or 3 friends together and you do the same practice then this would be better. So I'm hoping that even more people will participate and practice, we can get these people together to make a mutual inquiry into the subject, this is better.

DB: This seems to be a special feature of taijiquan: bringing people together, creating a community of

practitioners. Why does taiji have this quality? For example I teach at a Senior Center and many seniors live very solitary lives, but when they come to taiji class its like a family coming together.

YZD: Each activity has its own characteristic or style, suitable to different peoples needs.

For example, taijiquan today is very suitable for the international social environment, where people are better off. Even in China the living standards are improving. When people's living standards improve inevitably they focus on health activities. They want to be healthy. If you live well, you want to enjoy good health. What sort of method will you pursue? Today taijiquan is for young and old, men or women, healthy or sick.

Everyone can participate and this of course can have a good effect. As their taijiquan studies progress, everyone is very interested to learn. Of course it looks nice on the outside and this is interesting and enjoyable. Naturally we want to be healthy and are attracted to this activity. For many different reasons it's easy for us to come together.

"Hey, you're doing taijiquan! I practice too! Let's get together." When you practice taijiquan it doesn't matter what country you come from, Chinese or American, wherever - we don't feel separate. Of course taijiquan is from China, but in fact it benefits the whole world. It's good for everyone's health.

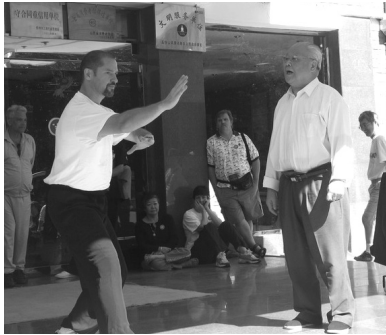
DB: Your father, Yang Chengfu, began teaching publicly to help improve the health and spirit of the Chinese people. This seems an important focus for the Yang family, to share their techniques not for martial purposes but to help people to improve their health. In his generation taijiquan spread in China, in your generation it has expanded worldwide.

this way. Everyone has different circumstances. But we hope that when you study you can find a great teacher. When I say "great" teacher I don't mean one with a famous reputation but one with great morals/ethics. Don't look for a mixed up or confused teacher. They should know the principles, what's correct and how to do it.

This kind of teacher can help you. They know the reasons; this kind of teacher can help you to gradually, naturally, become successful. In Chinese we use the term gongfu to mean both time and skill. We say when the time spent practicing is there, you will naturally become skillful. When we practice taijiquan we pay particular attention to imitating the postures and trying to understand what is going on. When we practice together you need to watch others and examine yourself. There's a lot of imitation as you learn, find someone who does it well and look how they perform. Which places are well done and which are not. Learn to evaluate others and examine how you do it yourself.

Observe, if they do it correctly, follow along with them. If they don't, understand why. I believe if we do it this way we can gradually improve.

DB: Some people don't have a teacher but now we have this new technology. Have you seen Yang Jun's new DVD? What is the best way to study in this case? Do you have any suggestions for the individual student?



Could you comment on this important evolution from martial technique to therapeutic activity?

YZD: It is this way: the martial arts include taijiquan. As society's weapons have changed so have the martial arts. Gradually on the battlefield, the hand held weapons like guns, knives and swords have given way to modernized weapons. In the China of my father's time, we already started to have foreign guns and cannons. Now we have even more modern and terrible weapons. Back then the elders of our family had a prediction. They considered that gradually the martial elements would move to the background, as weapons become more modernized. They knew that the martial arts were not only for resolving battles. They recognized the many benefits of taijiquan. Even before my father's time, our family already predicted and anticipated this development.

So martial arts were changing. Changing to what? Not to battlefield development, but as a way to improve peoples' health. They saw this change as inevitable. Back then martial arts could not prevail in war, and if you follow the development to now, the weapons are even more amazing: weapons of mass destruction. Martial arts could not keep up. It has already changed to a method for keeping healthy. Add on the slow, fluid motions, the 10 principles and it becomes much more than a martial art. It improves your health, strengthens your body, cures illness, provides artistic enjoyment,

and even moulds one's character. It has developed into a multi-function activity.

Does it still have a martial character? Yes, very much so. Why do we present the palm in a certain way? It needs to have its martial aspect expressed. This content. (At this point Yang Laoshi presents a sharply defined standing palm) If you don't have this meaning it is empty. It's like actors must have an internal feeling to express an emotion.

The basic martial content must be there, and then you can show it in your intent. It must be there. We're not fighting anyone, but even if you are by yourself practicing it's similar to facing an opponent. If you don't have this idea of content, your mind is not there, and it's not focused. In the past we had a saying for beginners that practice makes perfect. Once you are familiar with it, it becomes natural. Like when you count from 1 to 10 you don't have to think about it, it's just natural. When you practice taijiquan it's just the same, but you need to have the content. So sometimes without this content during practice I'm thinking... thinking...thinking about something else. I'm taking a small trip in my mind. My mind is thinking all sorts of things. You need to have some content to focus on, not necessarily the attack and defense aspects – you can be thinking "Am I sinking the shoulders, how do I do that?" By doing this, my mind can become stable and set. Then it won't be affected by running around thinking all these other things. Daydreaming.

DB: *That's a wonderful answer. Thank you. Yang Laoshi: you, Jeremy and I met in 1993 in Maryland and both of you are my old friends. In the time since then up to now your work has been so valuable. The time you have spent traveling the world has helped*

many people. Teaching seminars, you've made many good friends. All of us would like to thank you for all the hard work. We hope you can enjoy your next 80 years. (laughter) We appreciate the time you have spent with us this evening, thanks so much.

YZD: I'm one of the descendants of the Yang family. Since our founding, I am a fourth generation successor. As a descendant of the Yang family, this work is something I must do for Yang style taijiquan. Although I have gone to all these different places and done a certain amount of work, this is something that is completely necessary. Not just I, but any member of the Yang family should. And now, not just the Yang family, but others have been working as well. For example, our discussion tonight also is helping to promote taijiquan. We have a common goal to do a good deed. We are working hard towards the common good and this makes us feel happy inside. In China we say although the hard work may be bitter, it is still sweet. The work looks hard but we can feel happy. So this is something we need to do. We Chinese believe our past generations are still present. Their spirits know that our work has helped spread taijiquan throughout the whole world and they feel comforted. Looking down at us they can rest in peace and be happy. Being a member of the Yang family has made this even more necessary. This duty is something that I could not refuse.

Today to be with you two and talk about these things, looking at the general development of Yang style taijiquan, I feel very happy. Both of you are working and teaching as well. This is very good. Personally, I want to thank you for this. After you return home and see your taiji friends please tell them, "I saw Yang Laoshi. He's very healthy. Not only that, but he asks how you are!" ☺

EXPLORING *Push Hands*



By Lance Lu

I started studying push hands with Yang Laoshi in the year 2000, when our school was still relatively small and located in the basement of the New Central Building in Seattle's Chinatown. The class had been in progress for some time, and as the new student, I was behind everyone else. Laoshi was very patient and tried to help me catch up with the rest of the class. Like most beginners, I felt a little overwhelmed trying to learn the basic circles. Now, after five years of training, I am still practicing circles. While it feels much more natural now, the circles are still not perfect. Many times over the years, Laoshi would tell our class "Your sticking is still not enough, practice the circles more." The circles help us learn to stick, adhere, connect and follow our opponent.

"In the olden days, Taijiquan push hands was also known as press hands, sparring hands, fighting hands, and sticking hands - they all fall within the scope of Taijiquan. After a certain level of proficiency is attained, push hands is used as a Taijiquan practice tool. Two persons establish contact with each other through their hands, mutually turning and twisting, following the Taijiquan requirements of 'stick, adhere, connect, and follow', and applying the eight methods of 'ward off, roll back, press, push, pull, split, elbow, and shoulder". In addition, one must follow the principles of not losing contact or resisting, finding a way out of any situation, following a curve and then extending, and turning smoothly. Use the sense of touch and the body's consciousness to understand opponent's energy level, speed, and direction. And then, choose the appropriate method of attack or defense, stabilizing one's own center, undermining the opponent's center, thereby causing them to lose their balance or fall. Taiji push hands is a defensive sport which involves skill, power, intellect, and courage."

Master Yang Jun

Yang Laoshi told me years ago that the study of push hands goes through a clear progression of steps. The student needs to thoroughly learn each step before moving on to the next step. There are no shortcuts and you cannot skip any steps.

In Tai Chi, the mind leads the body so concentration and attention must be present at all times during practice. A major difference between push hands practice and form practice is the requirement of having another person to practice with. To understand the other person, sensitivity and focus is directed to them, and not to oneself. Laoshi has often said we need to "give up ourselves to follow others." He told us years ago that whenever a technique doesn't work, whether on defense or offense, we need to spend time to ponder why it doesn't work. After analyzing the technique, we need to work with a partner to discover where the defect lies, and find out how to correct it. Clearly, this method of learning puts more responsibility on the student.

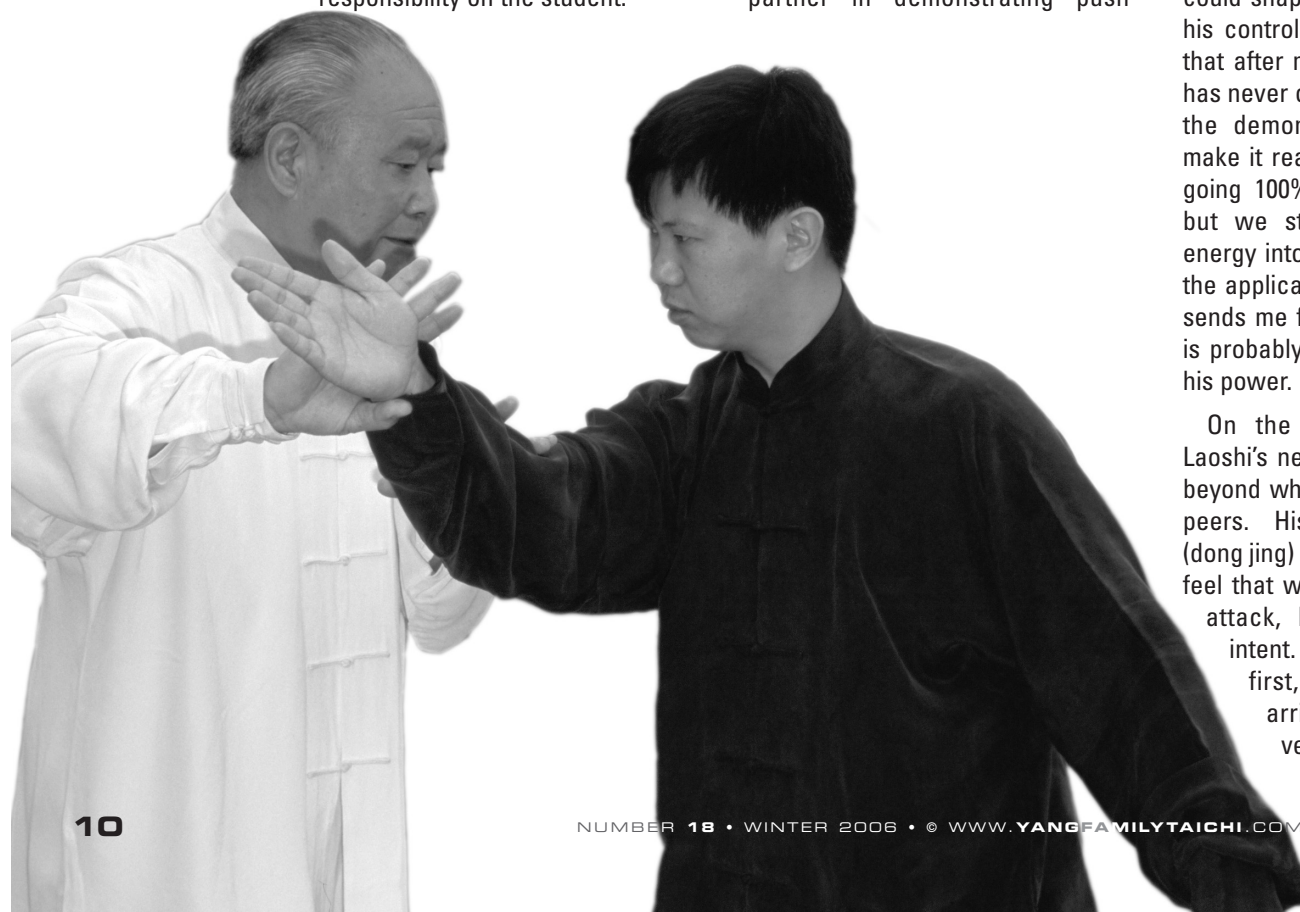
In my opinion, push hands is freer, more creative, than the hand form. Yes, there are rules and principles in push hands, and we must stay true to them. While staying within the rules and principles of push hands, I try to open my mind and learn something from every situation and from each opponent. To further our learning, Laoshi recommends that we practice with many different people. Each individual has their own feel, strategy and blend of strengths and weaknesses. With mutual respect and an open mind, we can learn from each other. I try to attend as many of Laoshi's seminars as I can. To spend five to six hours a day with Laoshi teaching and correcting us is invaluable to my learning process. I always have many things to work on after a seminar. Also, I get the chance to meet and experience practicing with push hands enthusiasts from outside my area, and often this leads to making new friends.

Over the years I have been privileged to serve as Laoshi's partner in demonstrating push

hands. I always feel happy and honored when I get the opportunity to experience my teacher's applications. After the demonstration classmates often ask me "What did it feel like?" I will try to describe the feeling of pushing hands with Laoshi. The first impression is one of Laoshi's softness (rou). His movements are connected and smooth, his whole body working as one unit, very calm and relaxed. I can feel no stiffness (jiang jin) anywhere in his body. Before we even do any application, I feel he is attached to me. The sensations of sticking and adhering he projects are very strong.

Beyond the physical, I feel he is inside my mind, already knowing my intent before I initiate any movement. When he demonstrates one of the eight energies in application, it is very powerful, but combined with exquisite control and suppleness (rou). The combination of power, control and softness is unlike anything I have experienced in external martial arts. His power leaves no doubt in my mind that he could snap my arm like a twig, but his control is at such a high level that after many demonstrations he has never caused me any injury. In the demonstrations we want to make it real. For sure, we are not going 100% to attack each other, but we still need to put some energy into the movement to show the application. Even when Laoshi sends me flying through the air he is probably using less than 50% of his power.

On the defensive side, Yang Laoshi's neutralizing skills are way beyond what I experience with my peers. His understanding energy (dong jing) is very penetrating, and I feel that when I am thinking of an attack, he already knows my intent. Even though I move first, Yang Laoshi always arrives first. His body is very flexible, able to rotate



in many directions. He can change his empty and full positions very quickly and smoothly. I always feel like he knows me; but I do not know him. It is very difficult to find his center, and I have never seen him double weighted. His demeanor is always very calm and relaxed; no matter how fast I attack, he always seems ahead of me, but never in a hurry.

Yang Laoshi has told me that we need to train our whole body so that every part of the body can neutralize and also release energy. No matter where your opponent touches you, you should be able to neutralize and counter attack. I am a long way from reaching that level. Currently, Laoshi has our class working on improving the flexibility in our wrist, elbow, and shoulder joints. It is inspiring to me just to have the experience of pushing with someone who has achieved such a high level of gong fu.

There is a Chinese saying: if you truly know and understand one thing, you actually know and understand many things. This is especially true when I think of the relationship between form practice and the study of push hands. To me, push hands and form practice have a yin/yang relationship. We study the form to understand ourselves; we study push hands to understand others. Form practice is usually done alone; push hands requires the presence of a training partner. Once in hand form class I asked Laoshi to explain the application of the lower circling arm in "Cloud Hands". He replied I already knew the answer but I just didn't realize it. He reminded me that he had seen me using peng in this way many times in push hands. Once he helped me make the connection, the answer to my question became very clear. Another example was last year, when Yang Laoshi was teaching our push hands class how to use push (an). At least half of the class

had studied the hand form long enough to have done an thousands of times. We quickly found out that even though we had practiced this move thousands of times we did not have the experience of executing push on a real live person. By only doing an in the air, our understanding was limited and incomplete; we did not really know how to use (yong) an.

Laoshi patiently and clearly demonstrated all the elements that go into the successful execution of a Tai Chi push. One important element is setting up your opponent for the push. When I attacked Laoshi, he yielded and attached to my arm. Using his sticking and adhering skills, he led me to a position that was good for him, and increasingly bad for me. By leading and enticing me beyond where I wanted to go, my root was compromised, and I felt very unstable. At this point, smoothly and without breaking our connection, Laoshi made a small circle and sent me flying backwards. Usually, the opportunity to use push comes from your opponent attacking you. Since there are infinite ways for your opponent to attack, you must first respond to your opponent's attack, then create the opportunity to counter with push.

In a correct Tai Chi push, Laoshi explained that the person releasing the push energy does not recoil backwards, nor follows the push forward. It is similar to a bow and arrow. When the bow releases its energy, it is still and relaxed. The arrow (your opponent) is sent flying straight away. To accomplish this, a number of Tai Chi principles come into play. Your front knee cannot bend too much. You must have a good root and correct stance. Your whole body must be relaxed so that your lower body and upper body can coordinate as one unit. At the moment of releasing energy, the internal feeling is that of soft going

to hard. Once you release, everything is relaxed and stable, and you have not moved one inch forward or backward from your stance. From Laoshi's demonstration, I came to realize that to use push is not easy or simple. To execute push correctly requires a combination of many Tai Chi skills, including sticking, listening energy, coordination and timing.

From the experience of doing an with others, I gradually started to understand the elements of Laoshi's teaching. Now when I do an in the hand form, my mind naturally incorporates my push hands experience, and my understanding of the movement is much better than before. My experience is that the understanding you gain in push hands will deepen your understanding and improve the "flavor" of your hand form practice. The movements and energies from the hand form are explored and utilized in pushing with another person.

In conclusion, I will share an observation Laoshi made earlier this year. I remember Laoshi telling us that the number of students interested in push hands is always small compared to the number of students who study the form. Today most people study Tai Chi Chuan to improve their health. However, Laoshi said that he is always pleased when a student expresses an interest in learning push hands because it is an indication that the student wants to understand more about Tai Chi Chuan. From Laoshi's experience, these students will probably stay involved with Tai Chi Chuan for a long time.


AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This article would not have been possible without the encouragement of my friend, Dave Barrett and my teacher, Yang Jun. I have tried to faithfully communicate some of the teachings of Yang Laoshi. If my efforts have fallen short, I take full responsibility for any errors in this article. I wish to express my gratitude to Master Yang Jun and Fang Hong for their continued support, patience, and inspiration. What little I know, I owe to them.

Tai Chi Chuan for Kids

A Report from the Sao Paulo, Brazil Center

By Angela Soci



For many years we have been researching how to adapt the practices of our marvelous art for western children and now, in Brazil, we have exciting results. Our intent is to give the children a special introduction to Taiji practice and principles. We hope to plant a seed in their lives in such a way as to develop a life long interest in the exercises and the philosophy of balance and equilibrium.

Our emphasis is very wide; encompassing their bodies, emotions and minds. First of all, we work with their bodies helping to make them strong. We introduce them to the images of the forms, playing with the movements in a very pleasant way. Softly, they realize the many possibilities of how we can move our bodies, stretching, strengthening and developing muscles and tendons without injury. We play with having contact with the energy and without any competitive intentions.

On the mental level, we emphasize developing attention by concentrating on the details, helping them to calm their minds. This has also helped a lot with their regular learning process in the schools. This exercise of

attention, concentration and reasoning, improves their self awareness and makes them very sharp to memorize new subjects! Thinking about the movements and their bodies together, and understanding the subtle coordination of the movements improves their self control and directs their naturally explosive energy for useful purposes!

On the emotional level, we work to improve their self confidence and ability to realize new things. We help to improve their creative minds and promote happy relationships with their class mates. We introduce the beautiful tales of Taiji, mentioning the heroes and fairies and these provide a good introduction to important ethical principles. Together we discuss these things, and the children always ask a lot of questions during the classes, sharing their doubts and conclusions with everybody.

The method we have developed is based on an approach of trying to maintain the attention of the children by combining play with practice. The classes include: playing with the names of the movements, making pictures of them, memorizing the images related to the forms



and exercises, talking about the animals related to the forms and their symbolic meaning in Chinese culture. The children's interest in Taiji practice is great. Teachers and parents can feel them becoming calmer, more attentive and less aggressive with friends and family members. They express wishes to go to Taiji classes and want to continue develop their skills.

We are beginning to work with children aged 6 to 10 years old and have two groups of children. The first group is organized by a social service agency, which helps poor children from the surrounding neighborhoods. Our instructor there is Roberto Batalha, "We must be patient but at the same time, be very strict, giving them the discipline and order in the class. They must have space to play, but at the same time, they must understand the importance of attention and so in between these two, I introduce the movements. They learn and came back to class with wishes to follow. These children have some special needs for love and care. It's very clear that Taiji classes, by combining the body work with calm activity, and telling the beautiful stories, I can feel they are becoming more confident. The good thing is that they do not want to miss one class!!" He gives free lessons once a week and is having good results with our method.

The other group is a part of our Center in São Paulo where the children are the family members of our regular students. The teacher is Mrs. Cristina Miyamoto, "My experience with children is new but intense! I understand we need to join the idea of playing with

working, and so in my classes I include drawing, chanting, even running, and jumping. Children have a lot of energy, and to introduce Taiji to them we must apply some method to attract their attention so they are very much interested in learning and developing the forms!! The stories are very important because they stimulate the imagination and so, using these, we go on to introduce the movements!"

The nature of each group is unique, with some clear social and emotional differences between one and the other, but the method of instruction is the same. The results are very nice and we wish to create more children's groups each year in Brazil, developing their interest in Yang style Taiji and making them good students in the future.

CLASS OBJECTIVES:

Classes are one hour and the meetings are once or twice a week.

Dividing the children in age groups from 4 to 6; 6 to 8 and 8 to 10 we have the following objectives:

1. Introduction to the Taijiquan movements – without a special sequence, we utilize the movements of the traditional form related with images of nature and animals and repeat them as much as the children can to understand the methods and get used to the postures and their meanings. As the children get used to the postures we go back to the regular sequences stressing their importance and developing the connection with the traditional teachings of the Yang Family.
2. Introduction to Chinese philosophy – using the names of the movements we go through the more beautiful

stories using them as a way to teach the ethics of martial arts. Also we go through the history of the family, introducing the names of the masters and their special characteristics.

3. Working with discipline – following the instructions of the teacher and participating in the different moments of the class, naturally the group maintains attention on what is going on and develops the feeling of discipline.
4. Improving the cooperation among class mates – sharing experiences through their bodies' movements and playing games together about all the subjects covered in the classes.

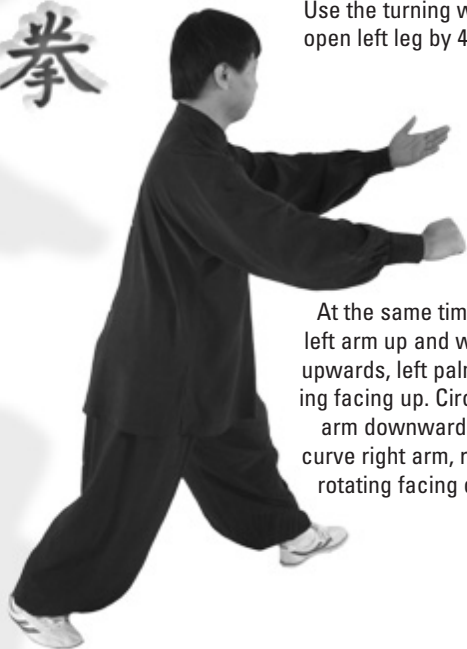
CLASS ACTIVITIES:

1. Stretching exercises using images of the body – *10 minutes*.
2. Taijiquan: introduction to the movements using the images of the names of the movements especially the nature related ones – *25 minutes*.
3. Working on the images using stories, pencil and paper, modeling clay, and other materials to review the idea of the movements and create an imprint and understanding about these on their memories – *20 minutes*.
4. Clean and pick up time – understanding the importance of maintaining the order of the classroom, everyone is engaged in saving the working material, and making the place ready for the next group class – *5 minutes*.

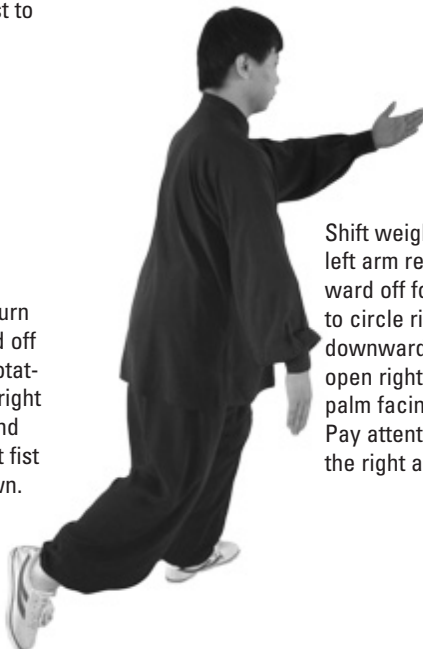
We are flexible in accordance with the needs and the interests of the children. Our experience tells us that we must not be too hard with the children, but we can't be too soft with them either. Discipline must be maintained, but we also have a lot of play time when they can relax and get ready to understand the good reasons to follow the practices we teach. ☯

太极拳

Shift weight slightly backward. Use the turning waist to open left leg by 45°.



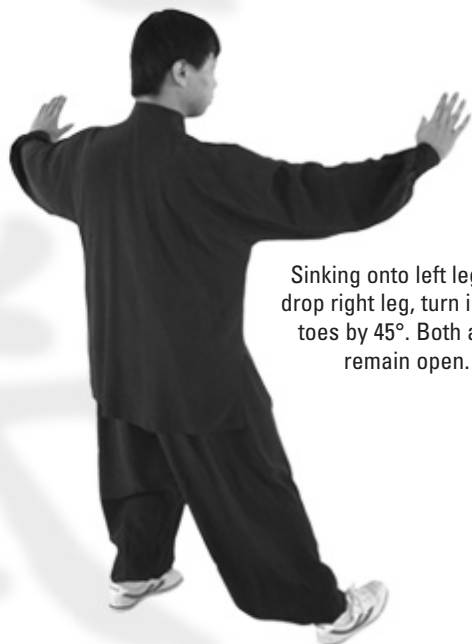
At the same time, turn left arm up and ward off upwards, left palm rotating facing up. Circle right arm downwards and curve right arm, right fist rotating facing down.



Shift weight forwards, left arm remains in ward off form, continue to circle right arm downwards, gradually open right fist with right palm facing inwards. Pay attention to keep the right armpit open.



Raise right leg and stand up, at the same time, turn right arm up and ward off upwards, close both arms. Keep right foot slightly turned in as if warding off downwards.



Sinking onto left leg and drop right leg, turn in right toes by 45°. Both arms remain open.

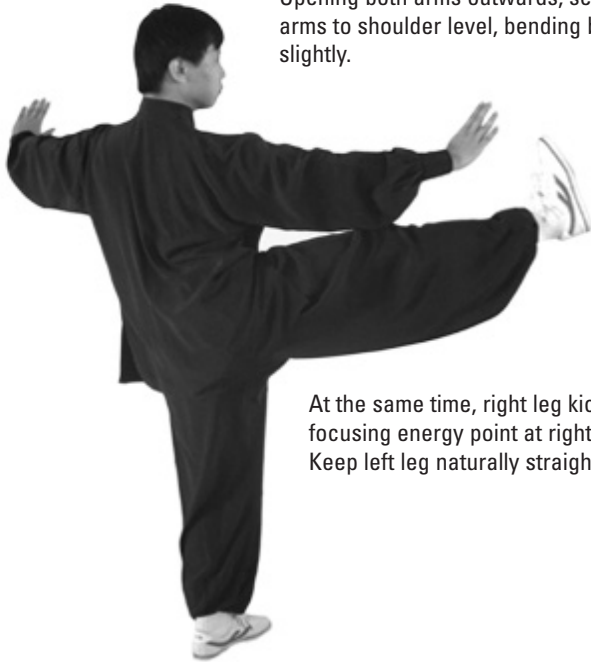


Shift weight to the right. At the same time, reaching with left arm to the right.



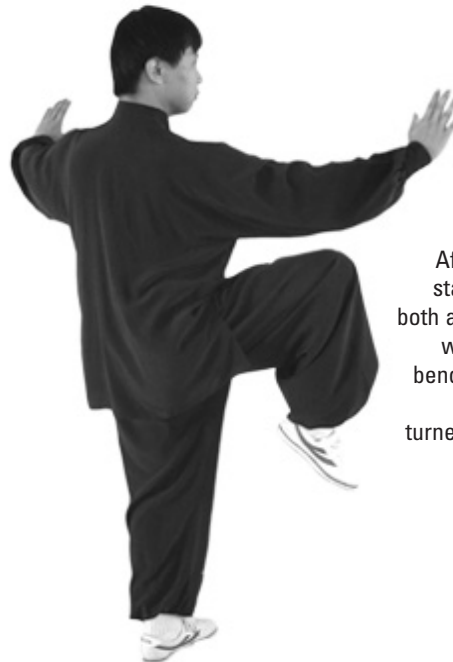
FRONT VIEW:
Pay attention to keep the left armpit hollow, elbow out

Opening both arms outwards, separate both arms to shoulder level, bending both arms slightly.



At the same time, right leg kicks forwards focusing energy point at right heel. Keep left leg naturally straight.

After the kick, keep standing on left leg, both arms stay opened; withdraw right leg, bending right leg with right foot slightly turned in as if warding off downwards.



Left leg steps forwards, left fingers pointing towards the middle of the right forearm.



FRONT VIEW:
Transition to Left Strike Tiger

After left leg touches down, shift weight forwards. Use the turning waist to circle left arm downwards, lowering right arm slightly with right palm gradually facing down.

太极拳



LEFT STRIKE TIGER:

Body squarely facing forwards, left fist is above forehead, right fist is in front of abdomen. The eyes of both fists are facing each other.

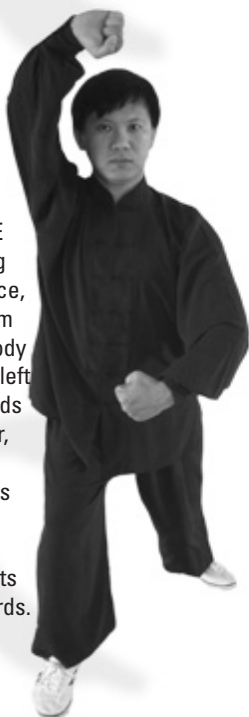


Shift weight backwards.

Turning the waist to the right, turn in the left leg by 135°. Hold both fists in position, rotating with the body.



Shifting into bow stance, circle left arm upwards to body center; circle right arm downwards to body center, forming both palms into fists as the hands reach center. Upper body tilts slightly forwards



RIGHT STRIKE TIGER: shifting into bow stance, circle right arm upwards to body center; circle left arm downwards to body center, forming both palms into fists as the hands reach center. Upper body tilts slightly forwards.



Using the waist, turn and open left leg by 90°.



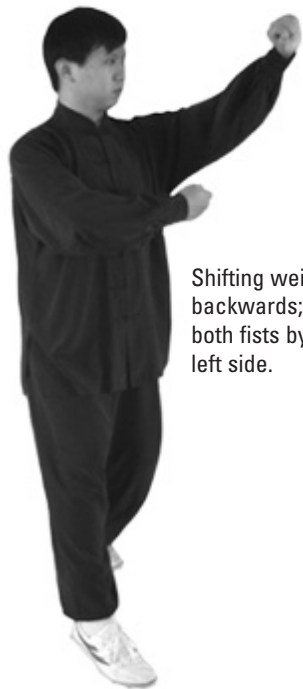
SIDE VIEW:

Transition out of Right Strike Tiger

Both fists will remain stationary.

Shifting weight to the left, at the same time rotate left arm upwards and right arm downwards; right fist facing inwards.





Shifting weight backwards; lower both fists by the left side.



As the left arm reaches shoulder level, open both fists.

At the same time, right leg steps forwards.



Shift weight forwards. Use the turning waist to circle the right arm downwards, lowering left arm slightly with left palm gradually facing down.



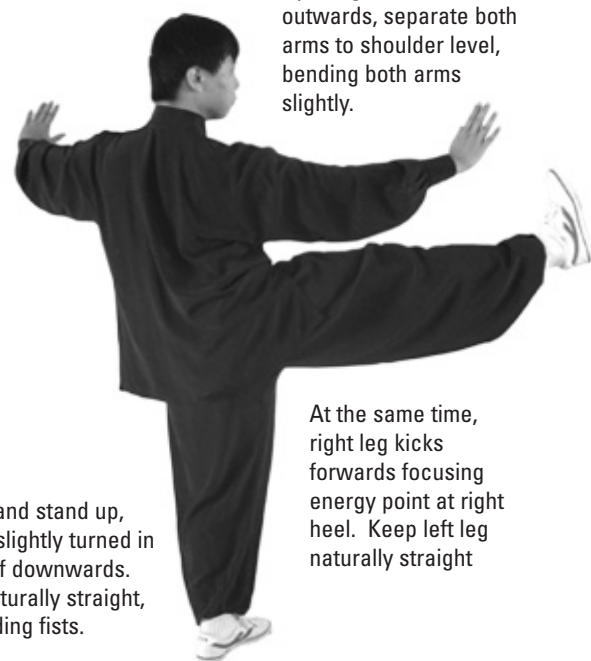
SIDE VIEW



Use the waist to turn in the right leg by 90°. Circle right arm upwards, cross both arms, keeping both fists closed.



Raise right leg and stand up, keep right foot slightly turned in as if warding off downwards. Keep left leg naturally straight, both hands holding fists.



Opening both arms outwards, separate both arms to shoulder level, bending both arms slightly.

At the same time, right leg kicks forwards focusing energy point at right heel. Keep left leg naturally straight



LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS OF SCIENCE AT THE TEN ESSENTIALS OF TAI CHI CHUAN

PART 2

Written and illustrated by Holly Sweeney

Yang Chengfu's Ten Essentials insured that the practice of Tai Chi Chuan would improve people's health. It is impossible to overstate the importance of these Ten Essentials in identifying the elements that make Tai Chi Chuan a healthful practice. Without the Ten Essentials, it is doubtful that Tai Chi Chuan would be recognized all over the world as a unique exercise system that offers special benefits to those who practice it.

PART I

Part II: Looking at: "Song yao", "Loosen the waist"

For this essay, we first have to define the concept of "the waist." We will use two established definitions for the term "yao."

One definition describes the structures that comprise "the waist." It states that "yao," or "waist," refers to the entire lumbar region between the hip bones and the ribs. It includes the lower back and kidney area, also, the "dantian" below and behind the navel.

The other definition describes a less tangible idea and states "the waist" can "be regarded as the space between two vertebrae,

rather than a circle girding the middle of the body." ¹

Both definitions will help us in our search to understand the intricate structure and complicated action of "the waist" in our Tai Chi Chuan practice.

The phrase: "Song yao," "Loosen the waist" is elegant in its simplicity. "Loosen" means to UNDO something rather than DO something and that is the most important thing to notice about this principle. It is the concept of UNDOING that makes "Loosen the waist" such a profound statement.

Investigating this principle will lead us into two different but related areas of biomechanics. One area involves the physical properties of the tissues that comprise our bodies. The other area examines the overall architecture of our bodies and seeks to understand these riddles: How can we achieve stability? How can we move? How can we be stable and move at the same time?

We will begin with the first area of biomechanics, the structure and function of the tissues that create body structure. We will continue

from Part I, in this series of essays (Journal #16, pg.14) which described "motor units" (a nerve cell and all the muscle fibers activated by it) and tendons (the passive elastic tissues that attach muscles to bones).

To begin to decipher, "loosen the waist", we look again at muscles.

Despite great advances in scientific understanding of how various parts of our body works, muscles remain somewhat mysterious. There are still many things that we do not know about HOW they work even though we have recognized them as structures since ancient times. In fact, the name, "muscles," comes from the Greek word "mys," which means both muscle and mouse. When muscles ripple under the skin they have the appearance of mice running under a tight covering. ²

Muscles are the most abundant type of tissue in our bodies and we know well the jobs that they fill: they protect our bones by absorbing shock, they produce movement at our joints, they provide postural support, and they can even help us stay warm when we're chilled. ³

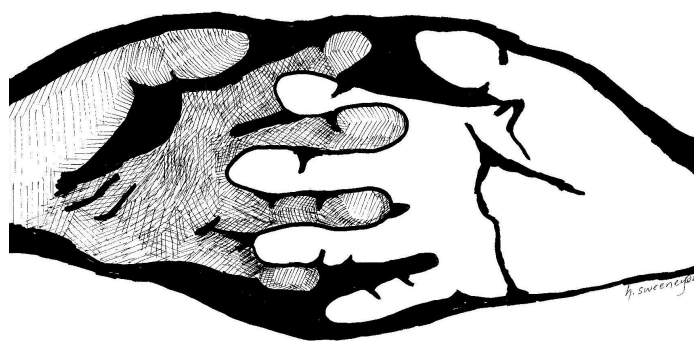


FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

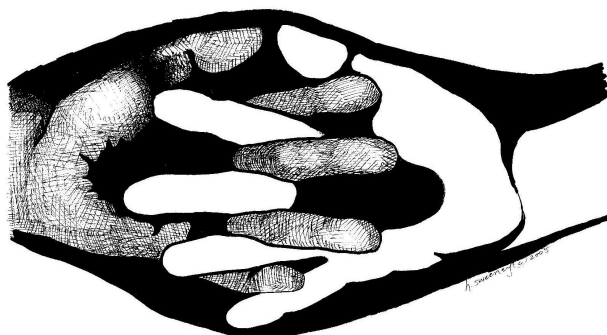


FIGURE 3

© Holly Sweeney, 2005

Muscles provide all these services by doing three things:

- 1) getting shorter
- 2) getting longer
- 3) staying the same length

Although it was not until the mid-1950's that science had a clue about how muscles actually did these three things. Two scientists, working independently, made the same discovery: muscles work because of overlapping, interdigitating filaments within each fiber. Ironically, the two scientists, although unrelated, shared the same family name, Huxley. The filaments they discovered were named Actin and Myosin. ^{iv}

We can imagine these overlapping, interdigitating filaments if we interdigitate one of our hands with the other. That is, interweave the fingers of one hand with fingers of the other hand and then slide the fingers into and away from one another. We will call the fingers on one hand, Actin, and the fingers on the other hand, Myosin.

When the fingers on our two hands have the most contact with one another, they represent a

muscle when it is at "resting length." At resting length, the Actin and Myosin have the greatest number of attachments to one another. (Fig. 1) If we slide our hands away from each other, like a muscle growing longer, we have fewer Actin-Myosin connections. (Fig. 2) If we slide our hands toward one another, letting our fingers dovetail at the base of each finger, this mimics a muscle as it shortens. In this situation, we also have fewer Actin-Myosin attachments. (Fig. 3)

There is an old saying that states 'the biggest trick the Devil ever played was to make people think he didn't exist.' Well...the biggest trick our muscles play on us is to generate the most force when they are at resting length. In other words, our muscles are at their strongest when we think they're not doing anything at all!

Muscles produce their greatest force when they are not changing length at all. ^v This makes sense when we look at the sliding filaments within muscle fibers. At resting length, there is the greatest number of Actin-Myosin bonds. When a muscle lengthens, some of the bonds are pulled apart and the

muscle loses some strength. When a muscle shortens, the filaments bunch up overtop one another and bonds are lost between Actin and Myosin. Whenever the number of bonds is decreased, the muscle loses strength.

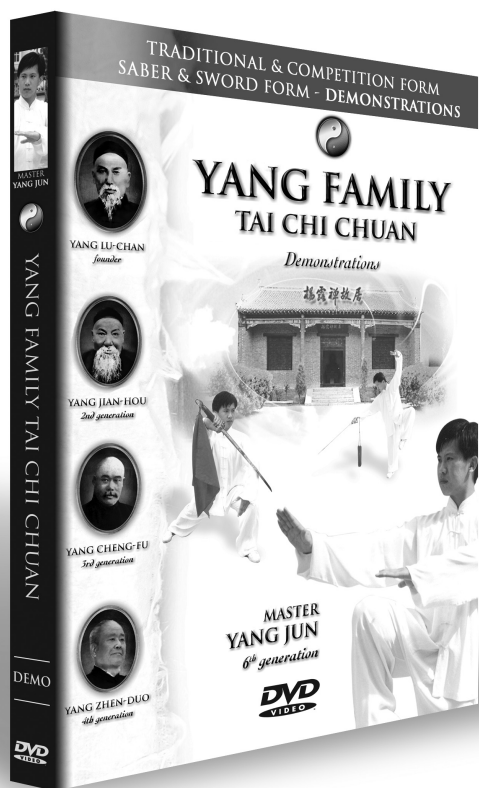
Understanding this aspect about how our muscles work is the first step in deciphering the principle, "loosen the waist." It explains why we need to UNDO. Allowing our muscles to be at resting length increases their strength. To increase the strength of our waist, we need to let the muscles in that area relax into their resting length. With this UNDOING; not contracting, not stretching, we find "song," From loosening, we find our greatest strength.

There is much more to investigate about "loosening the waist." The second part of this essay will appear in our next issue.

RESOURCES FOR THIS ARTICLE:

- I International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association. *Journal #3*, August, 2000. Pg. 16.
- II *Prime Mover*. Steven Vogel. Pg. 9.
- III *Basic Biomechanics of the Musculoskeletal System*. Margareta Nordin, Victor Frankel. Pg. 89
- IV *Prime Mover*. Steven Vogel. Pg. 46
- V *Prime Mover*. Steven Vogel. Pg. 25

New Demonstration DVD Now Available!



The Association is pleased to announce the release of the Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Demonstration DVD. Finally, on one DVD, students can find performances of the Traditional 103 Form, The 49 demonstration/competition Form, the Sword Form and the Saber Form. Also included in this presentation is a general introduction to Tai Chi Chuan, with some wonderful footage of Masters Yang Zhen-duo and Yang Jun, along with many scenes of Tai Chi being practiced in the parks of China.

All performances are by Master Yang Jun, filmed from multiple angles in Montreal's beautiful Chinese Gardens. The production values are very high, with traditional Chinese music in the background along with the natural sounds of the garden.

This DVD is an essential reference tool for students of Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan and can be purchased from the Association's website or at your local Yang Chengfu Tai Chi Chuan Center.

www.yangfamilytaichi.com



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