



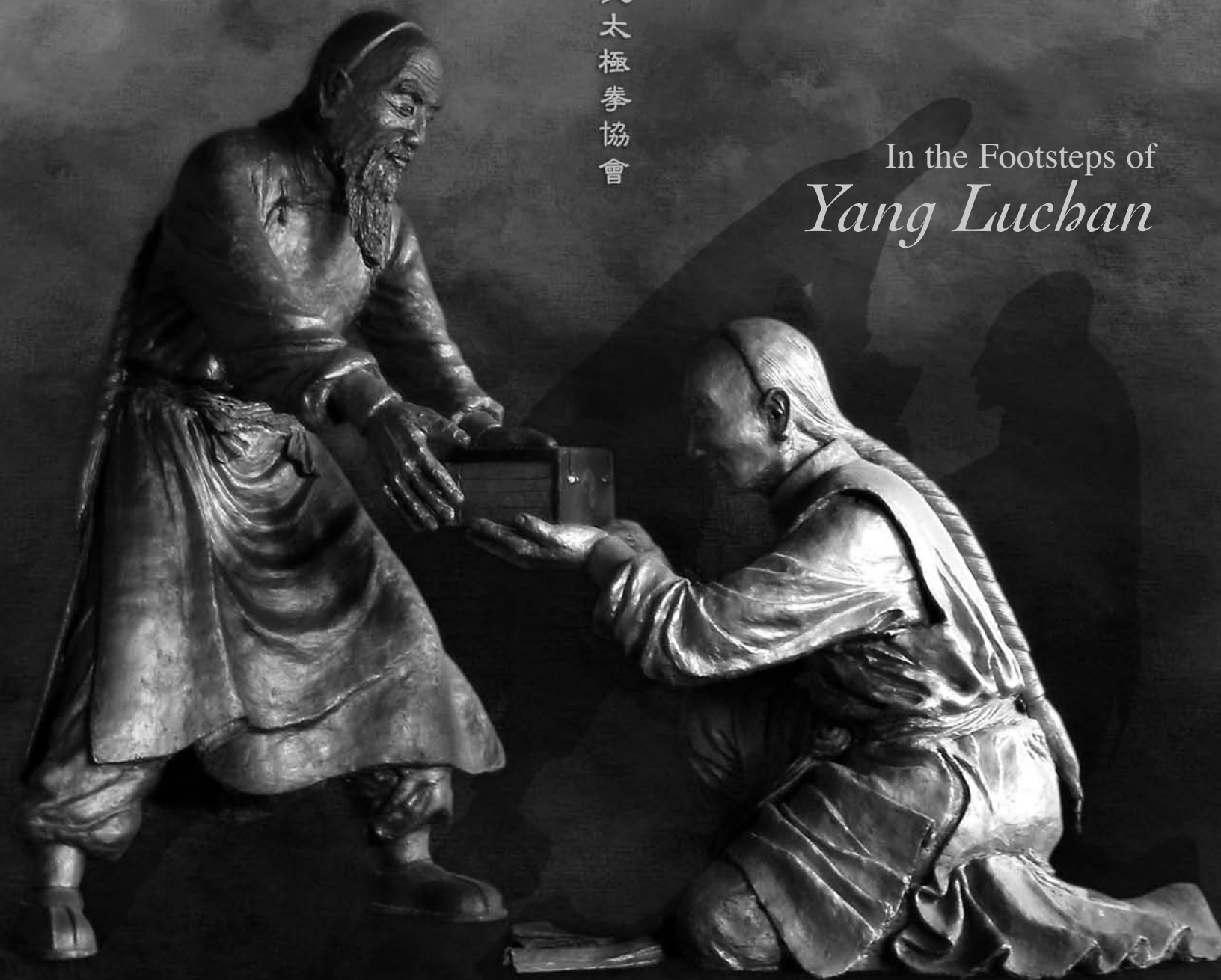
The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

Tai Chi Chuan

Number 20 • Fall 2006

國際楊氏太極拳協會

In the Footsteps of
Yang Luchan





Yang Luchan's house at Chenjiagou

At Yang Luchan's House



NUMBER 20 | FALL 2006 - CONTENT



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In the Footsteps of *Yang Luchan*

By Dave Barrett

As we turned off the main highway to Wenxian the road to Chen Village disappeared beneath a carpet of golden corn kernels. A thin ribbon of blacktop stretched off into the distance. All along the road various groups were shuffling the corn, turning it over and respreading it. It was harvest time in Henan Province and every side road in the area was awash in a sea of corn.

Driving the last few kilometers to Chenjiagou it became clear that every family had their harvest out drying. Some had set up beds at the roadside and sat patiently separating the kernels by hand from huge piles of corn cobs. One has only to recall the bitter history of famine that lives in the memory of these farmers to understand the tender care they lavished on each kernel.

The carpet of corn extended all the way into the village where we parked our van and hopped out into the bright September sunshine. We had come here to visit the home of Chen

Changxing (1771-1853) where Yang Luchan (1799-1872) trained for many years. The gate was padlocked. As our intrepid guide, Sunny, set off to find someone with the key; it occurred to me that we were waiting on the spot that Yang Luchan had stood 186 years ago also hoping to gain entry. As the story goes he was refused repeatedly and only after weeks of persevering was allowed to enter the compound as a servant. Not being from the Chen clan he was denied the opportunity to study with Chen Changxing. As Master Chen would teach, Yang Luchan hid behind a wall watching closely and practicing secretly until the day came when he proved his mettle by besting the Master's students. After more than a decade of intensive training Yang Luchan returned to his home village of Guangping in Hebei Province and the rest, as they say, is history.

Our small group included Yang Luchan's great-great-great-grandson, Master Yang Jun, John Mackie from

Glasgow, Scotland and Claudio Palacios from Buenos Aires, Argentina. Sunny came back with the caretaker and we walked in through the same gate that Yang Luchan had in 1820. The compound had of course been renovated but the basic layout of halls in the front and courtyard in the back was still there. Even the high wall where Yang Luchan had spied was at the back of the courtyard. Some stories place him peeking through a crack in the wall about which I've always wondered. How much can you see through a crack? Here the wall towered over the courtyard and it is clear he had a bird's eye view of the training ground. We had but a few moments to savor the special history of this place. It was a marvel for me to be in this out of the way corner of Henan Province with Yang Luchan's heir and a couple of dear friends who had been drawn from across the globe to this spot by their dedication to Taijiquan.

Outside of the Chen Changxing house the neighbor was raking his corn as we drove off into the modern world on our way back to Zhengzhou City. Our time in China was limited: for eight days we traveled the central plains of Henan and Hebei Provinces. The countryside was Autumnal, dressed in faded browns and muted grays with bright patches of golden corn on the rooftops and side roads.

We were on our way north to Handan City and stopped at the Shaolin Monastery. It was suitably impressive and one day in the distant future it will be ancient again. Sadly, the birthplace of Zen Buddhism and the cradle of extraordinary martial techniques was burned to the ground by a warlord in the 1920's. The Government, under the direction of Deng Zhaoping, spared no expense to rebuild it in the early 1980's and it has become a cash cow. There were thousands of people there, all paying 100 yuan for the privilege. Forgive me,

Gentle Reader, if I strike a sour note here. The surrounding mountains were beautiful and if one tried hard enough you could almost imagine old one armed Bodhidharma terrorizing the monks. In fact, you could get your picture taken with him!

Heading north to Handan City we arrived for the opening ceremonies of a huge Taijiquan competition that drew participants from all across China as well as international competitors. This was a very big deal for Handan and they truly put the Grand into Grand Opening Ceremony! Picture a packed sports stadium, laser lights, thundering pop music and a cast in the tens of thousands. Going back to the early days of the Revolution, the Chinese have mastered the art of spectacles involving multitudes of flag waving, fan dancing, marching performers. What is different nowadays is that the colors are rainbowed and not a solid sea of red.

The road to Chenjiagou



Yang Jun at Yang Luchan's Grave



Yang Luchan's hiding place



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Please recycle



Yang Luchan neutralizes the Bird

At Yang Chengfu's grave



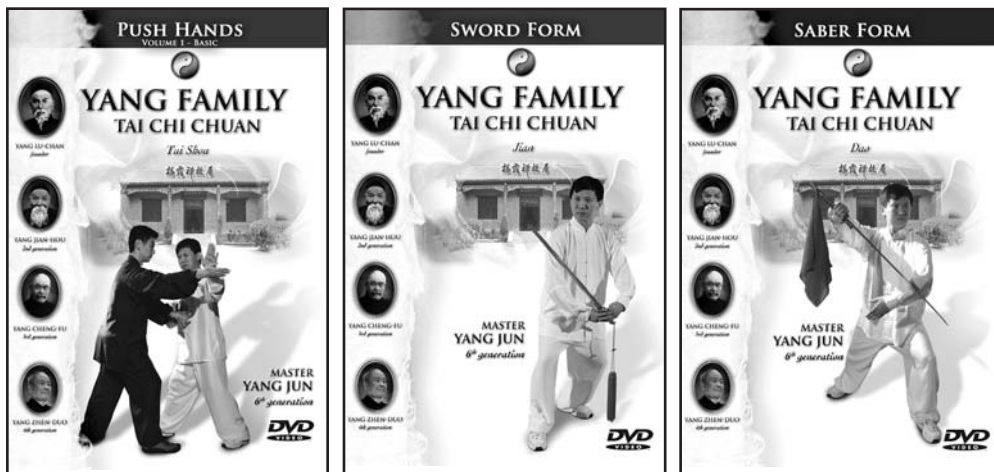
For three hours almost every school aged child in Handan marched out onto the field for a five to eight minute routine and ran off to make room for the next act. These groups by our quick count of rows averaged 1500 performers. At one point over 2000 Taiji players in gold silks took the field and performed the 24 Form Simplified Taiji routine. Indeed, the whole theme of the event was the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the 24 Form. It was an amazing sight: the lines were absolutely straight, the motions perfectly synchronized across the field. You just had to shake your head in wonder. The finale featured a well known pop star singing a specially written song about Taiji with a thunderous soundtrack behind him and screaming teenage fans.

The next day I had a chance to ask Masters Ma Hailong and Sun Yongtian about what their revered teachers would have thought about such an event. They shot each other a look and chuckled. They both agreed that their old teachers would be pleased so many people are interested in and practicing Taijiquan today. Master Ma spoke for them both when he said that what Taijiquan really needs is silence: quiet, tranquil and focused practice.

From Handan City it is only a short drive to Yang Luchan's home village of Guangping. We joined Master Yang Zhenduo for a very special visit to his ancestral home. The ancient caretaker was beside himself with joy to see the Master and his grandson and we had another deeply felt encounter with Yang family history.

Leaving the paved road we bounced down a country lane for a while, at last could go no farther and walked the final distance to the Yang family gravesite. This was behind the village, almost out in the fields. We were met there by another ancient relative, his face as weathered as the harvested fields. He and a group of men had spent some time clearing brush from the graves. Master Yang Zhenduo gave them a gift of roasted duck and a couple bottles of local firewater. They were politely curious as was a gathering crowd of farmers surprised at our outlandish appearance in their midst. We were outlanders in the truest sense of the word. The Masters were impeccably dressed, John, Claudio and I obviously not from around there as well. However the solemn purpose of our visit was plain to all. Here was the final resting place of Yang Luchan, his sons and grandsons. This year marks the 70th anniversary of Yang Chengfu's passing. We had brought some flowers and Yang Laoshi asked me to place them at Yang Luchan's and Chengfu's graves. Even now it is difficult for me to recount the emotions I felt at this moment. I remember reaching down, digging my fingers into the rich loamy soil and thinking that from this fertile plain an extraordinary family had sprung up and now had drawn us from across the world to pay our respects. There, with the heirs of Yang Luchan, we bowed deeply to the memories of these great teachers. ☯

3 NEW DVD^s ARE READY FOR RELEASE



We are very excited to announce the release of three new DVDs featuring Master Yang Jun. The Sword DVD runs two and a half hours and the Saber DVD is 90 minutes long. Using the same method had the Hand Form DVD; the forms are presented section by section, with explanation of basic sequence points as well as new information concerning the applications, or as Yang Laoshi put it, "the meaning of the motions." The Push Hands DVD runs 90 minutes and presents a comprehensive introduction to the single hand and double hand circle patterns. Look forward next summer to the release of a fourth DVD covering applications and neutralizing counter applications in the hand form and the push hands curriculum.

2007 Seminars

**FEB 17-18, 2007 • 49 form corrections
EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ USA**
Contact: Andy Lee
leeandy@yangfamilytaichi.com
www.taichiusa.com

**FEB 24-25, 2007 • Hand form
STOCKTON, CA USA**
Contact: Bing Hui
(209) 462-7035
bing@yangfamilytaichi.com
www.stocktontaichi.com

**MARCH 10-11, 2007 • 49 Hand Form
MANCHESTER, NH USA**
Contact: Michael Coulon
Ph: (603) 623-2371
michael@yangfamilytaichi.com

**MARCH 23-25, 2007 • Hand Form
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO**
Contact: Daniel Corona A
Tel: 52-7773-1760-19
www.kungfu.com.mx

**APRIL 7-9, 2007 • Hand Form
APRIL 11-12, 2006
-I Sword Form I-
PARIS, FRANCE**
Contact: Duc Nguyen Minh
Carole Nguyen Minh
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duc@yangfamilytaichi.com

**APRIL 14-15, 2007 • Hand Form
BARCELONA, SPAIN**
Contact: Jose Luis Serra Flores
Cell: +34 606 375 619
Ph/Fax: +34 932 680 385
ceitai@telefonica.net

**MAY 6, 2007 • 103 Hand Form
MILAN, ITALY
MAY 7-9, 2007 • Sword Form
MAY 11-13, 2007 • 103 Hand Form
ROME, ITALY**
Claudio Mingarini or Giuseppe Turturo
Tel: (W) 39-6-8610590
Cell: 39-347-3635333
www.taichiyangfamily.it
claudio@yangfamilytaichi.com or
giuseppe@yangfamilytaichi.com

**MAY 16-19, 2007 • 103 Hand Form
MAY 21-22, 2007 • Saber Form
BERLIN, GERMANY**
Contact: Johannes Mergner
Ph: +49-30-34787871
Fax: +49-30-36407017
johannes@yangfamilytaichi.com
www.yangstil-taiji.de

**JUNE 9-10, 2007 • 49 Form
JUNE 11-12, 2007 • Sword Form
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY USA**
William Wojasinski or Carl Meeks
william@yangfamilytaichi.com or
carl@yangfamilytaichi.com
www.kentuckytaichi.com

**June 15, 6:30-9:30 • Saber correction
June 16 day • 49 form
June 17 67 • Sword correction
TROY, MICHIGAN USA**
Contact: Han Hoong Wang
PPH: (248) 680-8938
han@yangfamilytaichi.com
www.michigantaichi.com

**June 22-24, 2007 • Hand Form
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON USA**
Contact: Fang Hong or Nancy Lucero
Fanghong@yangfamilytaichi.com or
Nancy@yangfamilytaichi.com

**AUG 16-17, 2007 • Sword Form
AUG 18-19, 2007 • Hand Form
MONTREAL, CANADA**
Contact: Sergio Arione
Ph: (514) 684-9584 • (888) 548-2454
Fax: (514) 684-8291
www.taichimontreal.com
sergio@yangfamilytaichi.com

**AUGUST 25-26, 2007 • Hand Form
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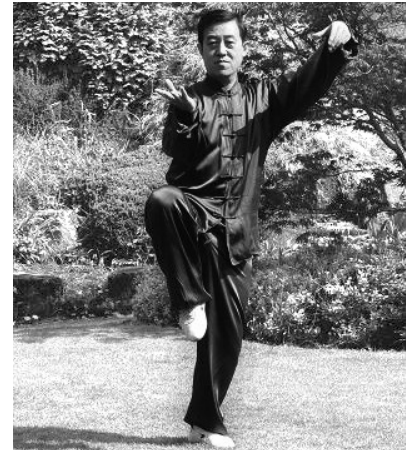
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The International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan.

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A Conversation with Master Chen Zhenglei

By Dave Barrett, translated by Master Yang Jun

Master Chen Zhenglei was born in 1949 into a family with over 300 years of martial arts tradition. He is widely recognized as one of the leading exponents of Chen Style Taijiquan in the world today. His Uncle, Chen Zhaopei (1893-1972), was his main instructor along with another Uncle: Chen Zhaokui (1928-1981), the son of Chen Fa-ke. Chen Zhaopei left his home village, Chenjiagou, in 1914 and established himself in Beijing as a martial arts instructor. The story goes that he set up a platform at one of Beijing's main gates and for seventeen days accepted all challenges, either single or multiple, and was victorious in every fight. Displaying his deep skills and magnanimous character in victory made his reputation and for the next 30 years he taught in a variety of places across China. In 1958 he returned to Chenjiagou to find the old training halls abandoned and his relatives engaged in a struggle to survive a series of natural and

political disasters that had devastated the surrounding farmlands and reduced the villagers to a pitiful state. Recognizing that the future of his family's illustrious traditions hung in the balance, he moved back to Chenjiagou and began to revive the training regimens that had produced so many generations of excellent martial artists. Persevering through famines and political upheavals gradually the next generation began to emerge under his careful guidance. Out of this group of students came "The Four Tigers of Chenjiagou": Chen Xiaowang, Wang Xian, Zhu Tiancai, and Chen Zhenglei; all of whom have gone on to revive and expand the prestige of Chen Style Taijiquan.

When we were in Handan this past September, Master Chen Zhenglei was kind enough to sit down with myself and Yang Laoshi for the following conversation. I began by asking him about something we had seen on our recent trip to his ancestral village, Chenjiagou.

DB: I'd like to start by asking a personal question. Yang Laoshi told me that you used to be a farmer. When we were driving out to Chenjiagou yesterday, we were surprised to see all the roads completely covered with corn kernels drying in the sun. Did you work the corn harvest?

CZ: Yes!

DB: Is this done completely by hand?

CZ: Now we have some machines but when I was a farmer we did it completely by hand.

DB: So then it is spread out to dry?

CZ: Nowadays it is a little bit easier but they still dry the corn by hand and use it through the winter.

DB: How is it used?

CZ: We'd use it for food, also to brew alcohol, feed the chickens and pigs. Also corn is used as a material in medicine and it can be made into oil.

DB: The reason I ask is that at that time it must have been very difficult to work as a farmer and also train in Taijiquan.

CZ: Yes, I paid double than normal people in time, working as a farmer and training.

DB: So how did this work? Would you train early in the morning or after work?

CZ: Generally we would practice at night. The village schedule is different than working a factory job. At the factory your shift starts at 8am, we however had to rise at dawn, go out to the fields, work hard and then come back for breakfast. After breakfast again we would be out in the fields all day.

DB: So you would farm by day and train by night. Chen style is characterized by very tough and intensive training. Your generation had to work the fields and then endure this difficult study. In spite of this Chen Style has maintained its high standard of excellence. Tell us how this has been accomplished.

CZ: My teacher, Chen Zhaopei, would tell us of his training experiences and his 30 years of teaching in different places. He gave me a lot of ideas about my practice. He'd look at our

group and notice that some were not training quite so hard. He would tell us that these techniques were a treasure of our family passed through eighteen generations. If this transmission stopped with the nineteenth generation and could not go on, we will be ashamed to face our ancestors and we will also disappoint future generations. So everybody would be let down if we did not work hard. Because Chen Zhaopei spoke to us in this manner, our group, including me, felt a great duty. From a very young age I began to tell myself I must continue our family tradition. It doesn't matter how hard the work is, how tired I may be, everyday I cannot stop. In the early 1960's even we farmers had a hard time feeding ourselves. There was famine all across China. When I was young during those years many times we had not enough to eat: no meat, no flour for noodles. We ate wild vegetables and sweet potatoes. So my body couldn't get enough nourishment. When I was thirty I weighed only 58 kg. (127 lbs.). Very skinny.

DB: In spite of this you continued to train and we can see clearly the results of your dedication when you perform today. My question concerns the next generation and international students as well, how should we dedicate ourselves to training?

CZ: Of course, because China's situation has changed, not many people are willing to work this hard. On the one hand, I use the same methods as my uncle to encourage my students. I tell them about my training experiences. If I hadn't worked this hard at Taijiquan I would probably still be a farmer. Now I travel all over the world and have many students. Also today we have many more convenient aids to our study: books and videos. It's much easier to study than before. In the past, the training was limited to only males inside the family, very restrictive. My feeling is that all people should be taught openly. Before, these techniques were used to protect your life in a fight. Now it doesn't matter how good you are, anyone can use just one finger to pull a trigger and kill you. Today this is a cultural art which I would like to share with the world. I meet many foreign students and I can see their love of Taijiquan and many wish to learn. I feel a duty to develop and share these traditional arts. In the past fifteen years I have had study



“In China we say that if you practice for one day you get one day's benefit, with daily practice you can steadily improve. If you don't practice for one day you lose ten days of development. So practice everyday without stopping! Western students must understand this clearly. **Practice everyday!**”

materials translated into eight languages. My foreign students have helped with this work. What one teacher can do is limited, with these study resources the effect is greater, and anyone can buy them and study.

DB: I think no matter what language or culture, the student of Taijiquan is faced with a problem: if we practice by ourselves sometimes the practice can be very dry, empty of content. Can you offer any suggestions as to how we can make our practice richer, having more content and feeling of purpose?

CZ: What you have mentioned about other students, I also have this problem, this same feeling. We want to create an ongoing interest that leads to regular practice without stopping. At the beginning one learns the basic forms and

motion sequences. At that time if you don't have a good teacher to give you corrections and guidance it's difficult to continue your development. It's easy to drop out of the practice. On the other hand, with a good teacher this is less likely to happen. But if everyday you practice in the same way it is natural to become bored. So what can you do? You can pick up your sword or saber, different weapons, practice a little push hands. If you eat the same meal everyday you'll lose your taste for that dish. When your teacher can lead you to the level where the external techniques are combined with internal intent, when the Qi can permeate the whole body, when you have

that feeling, then with each practice there will be improvement. When this feeling improves with each practice you can spend less time with your teacher and more time in self study. It will be easier to continue because you have this feeling. Without this rich feeling during practice it is easy to lose interest and drop out.

DB: My first teacher always encouraged us by saying, "Catch the feeling!" Sometimes the feeling is there for just a small part of a sequence, but maybe with the next practice a little bit more.

CZ: In my experience with western students I know that sometimes they only practice once a week, sometimes twice or three times a week. Because they don't practice everyday this kind of feeling develops very slowly. In China we say that if you practice for one day you get one day's benefit, with daily practice you can steadily improve. If you don't practice for one day you lose ten days of development. So practice everyday without stopping! Western students must understand this clearly. Practice everyday! Not once or twice week.

DB: This is great advice. I don't want to take too much of your time, but I do have one more question. When you practice today and you hear the voice of your teacher in your mind, what is he saying?

CZ: In my younger years when I practiced I was quite serious

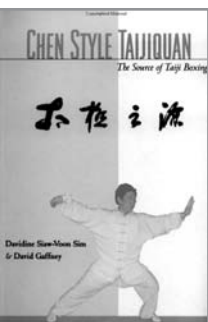
about my work. My whole life I have followed the teachings of my uncles, Chen Zhaopei and Chen Zhaokui. When they taught I always watched very carefully. At that time my deep feeling was that I wanted to grow up to be like them. I listened to their voices and watched their motions closely. At that time there were no recorders or video cameras. My eyes were the camera and my mind was the recorder. If I needed to check something I would sit down, close my eyes and review. If I was not satisfied with my practice I would check my memories and think about my Uncles. Sometimes I would hear them criticizing my efforts, using rough language to spur my practice onwards.

DB: So you still hear this?

CZ: Yes, even now when I may not want to practice I hear my Uncles' voices pushing me, giving me energy to practice. It doesn't matter what difficulties I've been through. In the 1980's when I met people who wished to challenge me I'd hear my Uncles giving me confidence to win these challenges. Throughout my career I have been through five stages. Firstly, when I was a farmer up to the time I was 25 years old I was studying with my Uncles. The next ten years I was working in a factory while continuing my martial arts training. I was traveling around as a salesman and I made contacts with other teachers and I was able to benefit from these friendships and improve our factory sales. During these ten years I would often represent our village at competitions. The third stage found me working with national sports officials and I became a professional coach. I continued my training and began to teach a large number of students, some of whom won many competition honors. In the fourth stage I began to organize regional and national competitions. Now at the fifth stage I've got a job I really like, traveling internationally and sharing my family traditions. When I was living in Chenjiagou I focused on my own training and my individual duty to our family. At the second stage I began to travel and see that perhaps there might be a career in the martial arts. In the third and fourth periods because I met many other teachers and was working as a player, coach and manager, I began to realize this could be a very good family business as well. Now that I travel internationally meeting many people who have a love of this art, now my focus is on how we can spread Taijiquan. I've been working on books and videos and I feel a true calling to this work, it is more than just a business. I've been fortunate to receive recognition within China as one of the top ten Masters and I'm getting a lot of support from my students and no longer have to work a factory job.

DB: Let me close by saying I think your career may have come a full circle. Again you are a farmer and you are planting seeds around the world and cultivating your family's art. I predict that you will have a rich harvest!

CZ: Now that China is open I wish to spread traditional Chinese arts throughout the world so that more people can enjoy Taijiquan practice.



Suggested reading for more information on Chen Style history and theory: *Chen Style Taijiquan: The Source of Taiji Boxing* by Davidine Siaw-Voon Sim and David Gaffney, North Atlantic Books, 2002



The 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Shanxi Yang Style Taijiquan Association



The 3rd Traditional Yang Style Invitational Tournament



Tour of Yunnan Province or Beijing

China Adventure 2007

The Association is pleased to announce the details of our trip to China in July, 2007 to attend the special Celebration of the Shanxi Yang Style Taijiquan Association and Invitational Tournament. We are planning an exciting and informative series of programs during this time that will combine Taiji study with sightseeing and travel.

THE TAIYUAN PROGRAM: July 11th to 17th

All travelers should plan on arriving in Beijing on July 11th. The next day we will fly to Taiyuan as a group. The following day we will be in preparation for the opening ceremonies and tournament competition. At the opening ceremonies on July 14th we will present a 150 person group of international students performing the 49 form. If you wish to be a part of this group please contact your Center Director as we will be preparing a detailed floor map, describing the formation. If you are not with a Center please notify Fang Hong of your intention to be in this group. This group will be in special traditional performance uniforms, which need to be ordered with your registration for the Tour. At the opening Ceremonies there will be demonstrations by groups from all over China and Master's performances from the 5 Traditional Taijiquan lineages.

During the three days of the Tournament there will be some very special study opportunities. After an early breakfast there will be practice in the park, attended by senior representatives of other Taiji styles who will be offering demonstrations and commentary on their traditions. In the evenings as well, these distinguished Masters:

Chen Zhenglei, Wu Wenhan, Ma Hailong and Sun Yongtian will present a

series of demonstrations and discussions in a conference setting. This will be a wonderful chance to learn more about other Taiji styles and these gentlemen are very kind to participate in this manner.

The competition will begin the afternoon of July 14 and run for the whole days of the 14th and 15th, concluding with a half day on 16th after which the awards ceremony will take place in the afternoon.

There will be a grand banquet to close the event that evening. For those not participating in the Tournament there will be a series of day trips from Taiyuan to the walled City of Yu Ci, the Changjia Garden and other local sites of special interest.

Our program in Taiyuan will conclude on the 17th. That afternoon we will fly out of Taiyuan, with one group heading back to Beijing for two additional days of sightseeing and the other group bound for a 6 day adventure into the highlands of Yunnan Province.

THE BEIJING TOUR July 18th and 19th

For those who have a limited time and budget for this 2007 Adventure we will be returning to Beijing to explore the Forbidden City on the 18th and visit the Great Wall on the 19th. There will be ample opportunities to get some shopping done and enjoy these two famous landmark destinations. Travelers should

book their homeward departure from Beijing on July 20th.

THE YUNNAN TOUR July 18th to July 25 or 26th

On July 17th we will fly from Taiyuan to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Called "the Spring City" for its mild climate, we will be staying here from July 17th to July 22nd. On July 19th, 20th, and a half day of the 21st we will have seminar classes from 9am. to noon and 3pm. to 5 pm. Master Yang Zhenduo and some of his senior disciples will be in attendance. During the evenings Master Yang will meet with us for question and answer discussions giving us an informal opportunity to talk with him.

On July 22nd we travel to Lijiang and spend one day and night there exploring the old city and experiencing the traditional minority cultures of the Yunnan highlands.

On July 23rd we fly back to Beijing.

We will have a day to tour Beijing on the 24th. On the 25th there is a trip to the Great Wall scheduled. Travelers who wish to see this may book their departing flights for the following day July 26th. Others who may have been to the Wall before can plan on leaving Beijing on July 25th.

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.

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

PART 4

A series of essays by Holly Sweeney,
Center Director, Montclair, NJ

PART III

Looking at: “Hang xiong ba bei”, “Contain the chest and lift up the back”

This principle means that the chest must not be puffed out. If the chest is contained then the back is naturally ‘pulled up’. (1)

The science of biomechanics sees two advantages in ‘containing the chest and lifting up the back’. One benefit is found in the overall organization of the musculoskeletal system and the other lies in the physiology of respiration.

In the previous essay of this series, (Part II, B, “Looking at Song yao, Loosen the waist”), it was established that the structure of our human body is based on the physics of tension. Our body structure is stabilized, supported, and moved by the action of our elastic tissues. This type of structure has a special name: it is called a “tensegrity” structure. (2)

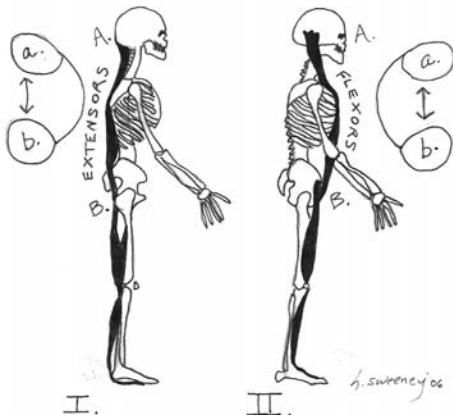


Figure 1

If we look at Figure 1, a tracing made from a MRI of a living subject, we see how our vertebral column is suspended within the soft tissues of our bodies. We can also see that our vertebral column is comprised of a series of four

curves; it is not straight like a pole. How much the curves are rounded depends on the actions of the elastic tissues that support our vertebral column. By shortening some muscles and stretching others, we can voluntarily make our vertebral column more curved or more straightened. As the lines of pull created by the action of muscles change the relative curvature of our spine, the tension created by the muscles is transmitted through the myofascial layers of our body to form continuous patterns of tension that give our body support and an external appearance which we call “posture”. That is why each of us has a distinctive external appearance even though what is on the inside looks very similar. The way we distribute tension through our structure gives us a recognizable shape (posture) and way of moving (coordination) that is as unique as our finger print.

Figure 2



Looking at Figure 2, we see a diagram of the lines of tension that cover the back and front of our bodies. Figure 2, Diagram I shows the “pull lines” of the Extensor System on the back of our bodies and Figure 2, Diagram II shows the “pull lines” of the Flexor system on the front of our bodies. (3) (Muscle action of the Extensor System and the Flexor System differ at the knee and elbow joint from the myofascial action at these junctions. For the purpose of brevity and simplicity, we will not delve into this difference in this essay as it does not affect the topic under examination)

Each diagram is labeled with “A’s” and “B’s”. In the Extensor System, the A is at the occipital ridge on the back of the skull and the B is located at the base of the pelvis. When the extensor system is shortened, the torso arches back. This is called “extension”. If we try arching our back, pulling point A towards point B, we discover it is difficult to do and rather uncomfortable. Acrobats and gymnasts and skaters and dancers learn to arch their backs

deeply after much training but the average person cannot arch very much. As we go into extension, the muscles in our backs tighten and shorten while the muscles in the front of our bodies stretch and elongate.

If we choose to go into “flexion”, looking at Diagram II of Figure 2, we will pull point A, near our ear, towards point B, which is placed on the front of our pelvis at the pubic bone. This is much easier! We can curve our bodies deeply and easily in this direction. In fact, we were born that way, in flexion. When we go into flexion, the muscles in the front of our bodies shorten and the muscles in our backs lengthen.

This experiment, pulling point A toward point B, first in extension and then in flexion, reveals a huge difference in feeling when the extensors are called into action versus the flexors. That is because their basic construction is quite different. The extensor system is comprised of a very high proportion of slow-twitch endurance muscles with fibers running from head to tail. The primary job of these

muscles is to keep us from curling over into flexion. Our ability to be upright rests solely on the function of these long, cable-like muscles, running from the base of the skull all the way to the base of the torso. The flexors have a very different composition. They are generally shorter muscles with fibers organized in many different directions and with higher proportion of fast-twitch fibers. They are capable of fast and complex articulations. If you’ve ever seen a belly dancer perform, you were probably amazed by the variety of movement the flexors can produce. In addition to producing fast and powerful movement, (think of a gymnast leaping into the air and somersaulting), the tensile strength of the flexors protect the organs of our abdominal cavity with a cross-hatched pattern of fibers designed to pull the abdominal wall in towards the center of our bodies.

In Figure 3, Photograph I, we see a woman with her arms raised above her head, shortening the extensors while the flexors are stretched. As a momentary coordination, it is OK with the

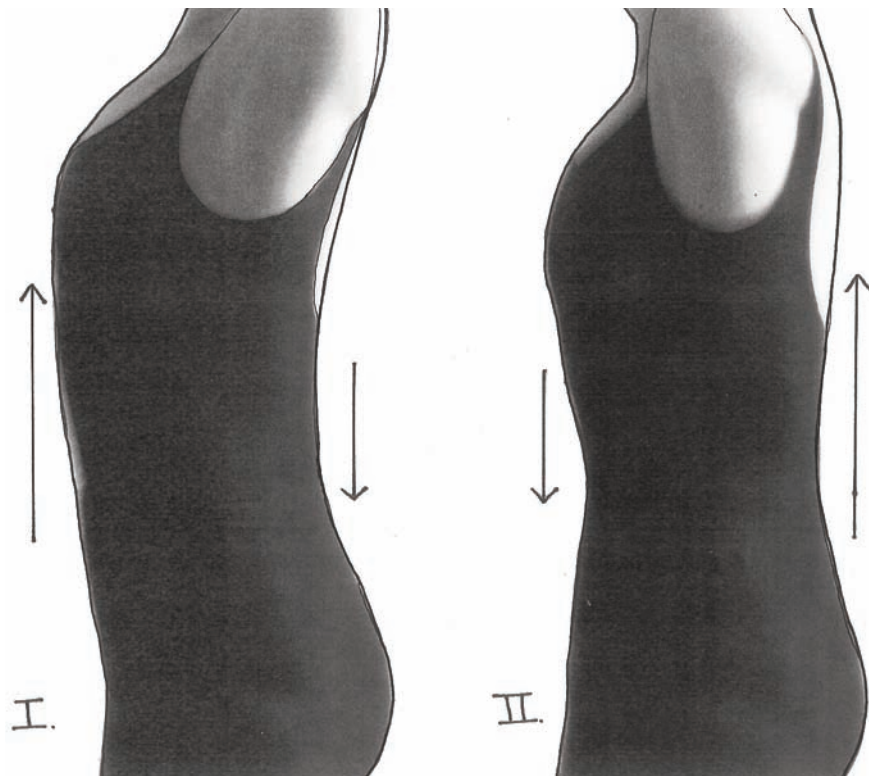


Figure 3

extensor and flexor systems to be called upon to lift up the chest and shorten the back. As a posture, it is NOT agreeable to the extensors and flexors. The

Figure 4



extensors are very unhappy in this posture because they are not at their strongest and most energy conserving state. In their shortened state they will fatigue easily and start complaining loudly after they have become tired. The flexors aren't getting to do what they like to do either. As an ongoing posture, they do not like to be stretched. It makes them fatigue faster and undermines their job of supporting and protecting the abdominal viscera. (4)

In Part II, photograph II, we see the same woman with arms raised above her head, containing her chest and letting her back pull up. In this posture, the flexors are happy because they are toned with a line of pull toward body center, allowing the flexors to do their job of protecting and supporting the organs. The extensors are happy because they are extended to resting length where they have their greatest endurance and strength to resist the forward pull of the flexors.

The principle of “containing the chest and lifting up the back” gives us the posture our bodies are designed to maintain for optimal structural support with minimum fatigue. The posture created by applying this principle also benefits our breathing.

Figure 5



The biomechanics of breathing involve the parts of our structure that move air in and out of our lungs. The lungs can be expanded and contracted in two ways: one, by downward and upward movement of the diaphragm and, two, by elevation and depression of the ribs which increases and then decreases the diameter of the chest cavity. (5)

Normal breathing is accomplished almost entirely by the movement of the diaphragm. To breathe in, the muscles that control the position of the diaphragm contract and pull the diaphragm DOWN. Then, to breathe out, the diaphragm simply relaxes UP and the elastic recoil of the lung tissue, chest wall, and abdominal structures pushes the air out. In other words, only

breathing in (inspiration) requires effort. Breathing out (expiration) happens without us having to do anything. Although, during heavy breathing, the elastic recoil is not powerful enough to expel the air fully, so extra force is achieved by contracting the abdominal muscles which push the abdominal contents up against the diaphragm to aid expiration. (6)

The second method for breathing is to raise and lower the ribs. Raising the ribs expands the lungs because, in natural resting position, the ribs slant downward, allowing the breastbone (sternum) to fall inward toward the spinal column. When the chest is “puffed out”, the ribs are elevated and projected forward along with the breastbone. This makes the chest area about 20% bigger. After breathing in, the abdominal muscles have to pull the sternum and lower ribs down to expel the air. This method of breathing requires work during inspiration AND expiration. Sometimes we may need a little bit more chest capacity to expand our lungs. Opera singers and pearl divers are good vocational examples of the need for increased lung capacity. However, there is considerable cost in terms of energy for this type of breathing. For the extra 20% of capacity, we have to pay out as much as 50 fold more in muscle energy. For this reason, this type of breathing is best reserved for short term demand. (7)

We can conduct an experiment on ourselves to experience normal quiet breathing versus extra capacity breathing. Looking at Figure 4, we will puff out our chests to lift up our ribs to draw air into our lungs. We will keep one hand on our abdomen to feel what goes on there. We will discover that it is impossible to expel the air without forcibly contracting our abdominal muscles. If we copy Figure 5, keeping our chests contained, we will discover that we can expel air without contracting the abdominal muscles. After breathing in, if we just relax, our breath will flow out passively. This way of breathing, with our chests contained, is very energy efficient, using only about 3 – 5% of the total work energy our body expends to maintain itself.(8)

In conclusion, the principle of “Hang xiong ba bei”, contain the chest and lift up the back, has a twofold benefit when examined through the lens of science. Both benefits have to do maximizing overall body performance while minimizing energy cost. Containing our chest and lifting up our back helps us maintain upright posture without fatigue. This principle also helps us breathe with great efficiency. ☯

1. The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association, #3, pg. 16.
 2. Ibid. #19, pg 11.
 3. Anatomy Trains, Thomas Myers. Pg. 60, 92.
 4. Ibid. Pg 61, 93
 5. Human Physiology and the Mechanisms of Disease, 5th Ed, Arthur Guyton. Pg. 282.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Ibid. Pg. 285.
 8. Ibid

Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Helps Diabetes Management

By William W. Wojasinski,
Director, Louisville Center

Diabetes is a serious disease that occurs when the pancreas produces very little or no insulin (Type 1 diabetes), or alternatively, when the body cannot effectively use the insulin (known as insulin resistance) it produces (Type 2 diabetes). Insulin is a substance produced by the pancreas gland that helps process the food we eat and turn it into energy. Insulin regulates blood glucose levels.

Glucose is the principal sugar the body makes that serves as its chief source of energy. Glucose is carried through the bloodstream to provide energy to all cells in the body. Cells cannot use glucose without the help of insulin. Insulin resistance is the diminished ability of cells to respond to the action of insulin in transporting glucose from the bloodstream into muscle and other tissues. The result is an elevated level of glucose in the blood that, if left unchecked can cause a number of serious or life-threatening problems.

Diabetes affects people from all walks of life and is reaching epidemic proportions throughout the world. In the US alone an estimated 20.8 million people have diabetes. Another 41 million have pre-diabetes, meaning having blood glucose levels that are higher than normal, but are not high enough to be classified (yet) as diabetes. And 1.3 million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed each year. Worldwide, it is estimated that 120 million individuals have the disease and this figure is expected to reach 330 million by 2030.

If diabetes is not well controlled it can cause long-term complications that over time lead to serious damage to many of the body's systems, especially heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. These complications include retinopathy (the result of long-term accumulated damage to the small blood vessels in the retina), neuropathies (damage to nerves in the hands, arms, feet, legs, organ system, etc.) and nephropathy (kidney damage). Diabetics also face increased risks of heart disease, high blood pressure (twice as common in diabetics as in non-diabetics), strokes (mortality rates from this disorder are three- to five-times higher in diabetics) and peripheral vascular disease (damage to blood vessels).

Good diabetes management is not only about lowering glucose levels, but also about the overall reduction in the risk factors for diabetic complications. This requires lifelong care and management. Studies have shown that many complications of diabetes can be prevented or delayed through effective management of the disease. This includes lifestyle measures such as a healthy diet, physical activity, and the avoidance of being overweight.

Although diabetes is an incurable, chronic disease, it is treatable, and the long-term complications are preventable. A successful life plan for diabetes is dependent on several factors. Three of the most essential are developing a lifetime eating plan, engaging in some form of physical activity, and attainment of an ideal body weight.

This article solely focuses on the effects and benefits of exercise on diabetes management. More specifically, the article takes a closer look at the benefits of including Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan as part of a diabetes treatment plan.

But a word of caution. Although there are two major types of diabetes (type 1 and type 2) the information presented in this article is more general in nature and does not target a specific type. The reality of how exercise affects blood glucose levels in each is complicated. Depending on the status of your condition and any diabetes-related complications you may have, you might have to take some extra precautions before making any changes in your activity level. Diabetes can cause health problems that can make certain types of exercise unsafe. The practice of Tai Chi is safe for those with either type of diabetes. It is incumbent on readers to do their homework relative to their type of diabetes before developing an exercise strategy. Each exercise plan has to be tailored to the individual. For most people, however, the benefits of exercise outweigh the risks.

Physical activity: An important tool for managing diabetes

Physical activity is a key factor in leading a healthy lifestyle and reducing the impact of diabetes on our health. Staying active is a very important part of diabetes management.

The interplay between exercise and diabetes is a critical one. Besides improving your overall fitness, exercise can also help you manage your blood sugar levels, control your weight and improve your cardiovascular health. Exercise also helps reduce the harmful effects of stress on glucose levels.

Exercise helps control diabetes by:

- Improving the body's use of insulin.
- Improving muscle strength.
- Burning excess body fat, helping to decrease and control weight (decreased body fat, especially around the waist results in improved insulin sensitivity).
- Increasing bone density and strength.
- Lowering blood pressure.
- Lowering 'bad' LDL cholesterol and increasing 'good' HDL cholesterol.
- Improving blood circulation and reducing the risk of heart disease.
- Increasing energy levels and enhancing work capacity.
- Reducing stress, promoting relaxation, and releasing tension and anxiety.

Tai Chi: an important part of a diabetes management plan

What has Tai Chi got to do with diabetes? Studies have shown Tai Chi to have beneficial effects on cardio-respiratory fitness; muscular strength, balance, and peripheral circulation, while reducing tension and anxiety. All these factors help minimize the complications of diabetes.

According to the American Diabetes Association, a comprehensive physical activity routine includes three kinds of activities: aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises.

The practice of Tai Chi meets all three criteria.

Several studies suggest that Tai Chi is a form of aerobic exercise that can improve aerobic capacity. For example, two separate studies conducted by the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, National Taiwan University Hospital and National Taiwan University, College of Medicine, Taipei, Taiwan, concluded that “Tai Chi Chuan is an aerobic exercise and suitable for participants of different ages and gender to improve their functional capacity.” One study goes on to say that “Our data substantiate that Tai Chi Chuan is aerobic exercise of moderate intensity, and it may be prescribed as a suitable conditioning exercise for the elderly.”

In the study, “Tai Chi: physiological characteristics and beneficial effects on health” conducted by the Department of Sports Science and Physical Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tai Chi is classified as a “moderate intensity exercise that is beneficial to cardiorespiratory function, immune capacity, mental control, flexibility, and balance control; it improves muscle strength and reduces the risk of falls in the elderly.”

Studies have shown Tai Chi to have beneficial effects on cardio-respiratory fitness; muscular strength, balance, and peripheral circulation, while reducing tension and anxiety.

Muscles are the major “users” of circulating blood sugar. Since we lose muscle with age, rebuilding it with strength training is very important for older adults with diabetes. Tai Chi is a weight-bearing activity that involves lifting or pushing your own body weight as well as shifting weight from one leg to the other. As the muscles of the legs contract and relax during form practice, they use glucose for energy. Improving muscle strength improves the body’s use of insulin.

The benefits of Tai Chi practice in diabetes control

Long-term regular practice of Tai Chi — for 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week — can provide a variety of benefits in the control of diabetes. Among them are:

Better blood sugar control – Regular practice of Tai Chi can improve blood sugar control in type 2 diabetes. As muscles contract and relax during exercise, they use sugar (glucose) for energy. To meet this energy need, the body taps into sugar supplies in the blood during and after practice, reducing blood sugar level. In addition, improved insulin sensitivity means the body requires less insulin to escort sugar into the cells, which also reduces blood sugar level.

Effective stress management – When you have diabetes, stress can significantly affect your ability to control the disease. Stress can alter blood glucose levels either directly or indirectly. When stress occurs, increasing stress hormones (the body’s fight-or-flight response) may directly alter glucose levels by making a lot of stored energy (glucose) available to cells. Insulin resistance inhibits the body’s ability to let the extra energy into the cells, so glucose piles up in the blood.

Stress can also affect your blood glucose levels indirectly. People under stress are less likely to take proper care of themselves as they should. They may forget about the regular routine of their diabetes care plan that helps them control their blood glucose levels. When someone with diabetes is “stressed out,” they may exercise less or skip exercise altogether, eat more often and/or eat less healthy foods. In general people who are under stress may be more focused on the thing that is stressing them and less likely to be focused on managing their diabetes.

Although you can't completely remove stress from your life, the regular practice of Tai Chi provides a means to counteract the effects of stress on blood glucose levels. Tai Chi invokes the body’s relaxation response by bringing together 3 powerful stress relieving techniques into one practice. These include breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation. Reducing stress through the regular practice of Tai Chi will help to better manage glucose levels.

Control of emotional eating - Often, our dietary choices are based on our state of stress and anxiety. Emotions can be triggers that produce a reaction in us that makes us want to eat. Thus, we end up eating for reasons that have nothing to do with nourishment.

Emotional eating is a problem for someone with diabetes that makes it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels under control. Practicing Tai Chi is a healthy way to deal with emotions that can trigger overeating. Instead of responding to stress or disappointment with unplanned, uncontrolled eating, relax, breathe and practice the form until the cravings subside. Tai Chi offers a major advantage as an alternative to emotional eating: It's enjoyable, and can be practiced almost anytime and almost anywhere.

Better weight control – Being overweight is the number one risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Excess weight can alter how your body responds to insulin. And it can also lead to other health problems, such as heart disease and high blood pressure that can significantly complicate your diabetes. Maintaining a healthy weight is crucial when you have this disease. Even a modest weight loss (5-10 percent) can substantially reduce insulin resistance and help control or even stop progression of type 2 diabetes in people with the condition.

With regular practice, Tai Chi burns calories, which helps you to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight. In addition, through the practice of Tai Chi (as with most exercise), one doesn't feel as hungry, thus you eat less. And through the reduction of stress, you may tend to not only eat less, but better, by making better food choices.

Improved blood circulation - Diabetes often leads to peripheral vascular disease that inhibits a person's blood circulation. With this condition, there is a narrowing of the blood vessels that frequently leads to significantly decreased circulation in the lower part of the legs and the feet. Poor circulation contributes to diabetic foot problems which can affect balance and stability in walking.

Tai Chi can improve circulation, especially in the arms and legs, where people with diabetes typically have problems. During Tai Chi practice the stretching and relaxation of the body helps to improve and restore muscle functions and improve blood circulation. Tai Chi practice helps to stretch and relax the muscles and promote blood circulation by decreasing the muscle tension which inhibits blood flow. The increase in the relaxation of the blood vessels helps to open, stretch and strengthen the capillary system within the body. Tai Chi is also easy on the feet where many of the problems associated with poor circulation exist and has been proven to be effective in improving balance and mobility.

Reduced blood pressure - Having diabetes increases your risk of developing high blood pressure and other cardiovascular problems. High blood pressure is an important risk factor for the development and worsening of many complications of diabetes, including diabetic eye disease, blood vessel damage, stroke, heart attack and kidney disease.

Having a normal blood pressure is as important to managing diabetes as having good control of your blood sugars when it comes to preventing diabetes complications. Tai Chi has long been recognized as being effective in reducing high blood pressure. Tai Chi techniques improve the body's strength and flexibility, teach one how to relax mentally and physically, and show how to better manage stress reactions such as muscle tension, rapid heart rate, constricted breathing, and anxiety.

As mentioned earlier in this article, Tai Chi brings together the 3 powerful stress relieving techniques of breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation. These techniques are as applicable to reducing blood pressure as they are to the control of glucose levels. The practice of Tai Chi will help control high blood pressure as it contributes to greater general health and well-being.

Diabetes can strike at any age, but your risk for developing the disease increases as you age. Although diabetes is a potentially life-threatening condition, people with well-managed diabetes can expect to live healthy lifestyles.

There is no cure for diabetes. However, it is almost always manageable, either with diet and exercise alone or with the addition of regular medical treatment. Diet and exercise also are key to reducing risk. If you are diagnosed with diabetes, you can cut by half or more your risk of developing many of the associated complications such as kidney disease and neuropathy by following an intensive glucose management regimen.

Successful diabetes management is based on a simple and powerful promise: Make small changes, get big results. If you already have diabetes, make Tai Chi practice a priority in your diabetes management plan. If you do not have diabetes, make Tai Chi practice a priority in your preventive health and wellness program. Either way, you will reap the numerous health benefits that a consistent practice routine provides. Taking good care of your diabetes today means avoiding other health related problems from the disease in the years to come.

Tai Chi is not the only form of exercise for people with diabetes, nor should it be considered a treatment by itself. A healthy eating plan, adhering to medication, stress control, as well as a safe exercise routine recommended by qualified health professionals are the cornerstones of diabetes self management.

Tai Chi is cost-effective and facilitates a lifestyle of health-related behavior practices such as good posture, healthy breathing and relaxation. You get the benefits from Tai Chi through practice. But it takes commitment. By taking control of your own health, you can enjoy the benefits of graceful aging well into your old age. It's never too late to start. Once learned, Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan is a treasure that will last you a lifetime.....a long lifetime.

Explore the power within you to change your life. 



#54 Cross Hands | #55 Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain | #56 Diagonal Single Whip #57 Right Wild Horse Parts Mane

太極



(Transition from Push)

Shifting backwards; turn to the right using the waist to lead the motion. Right arm follows waist and rotates outwards, both arms stay rounded.



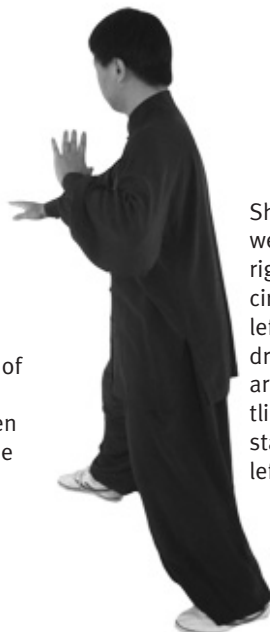
Continue shifting to the right, circle the right arm slightly upwards and then lower it to the right corner.



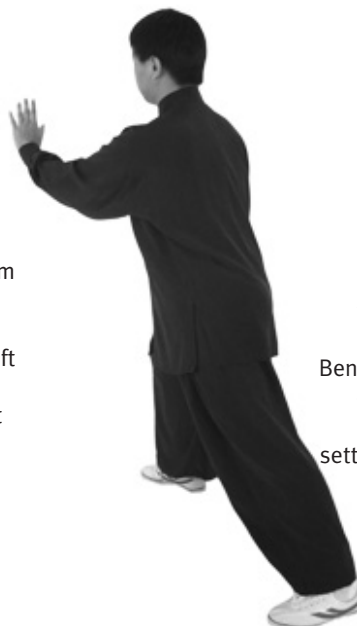
Shift the weight to the left, circle both arms downwards and turn in both palms, keep both arms rounded.



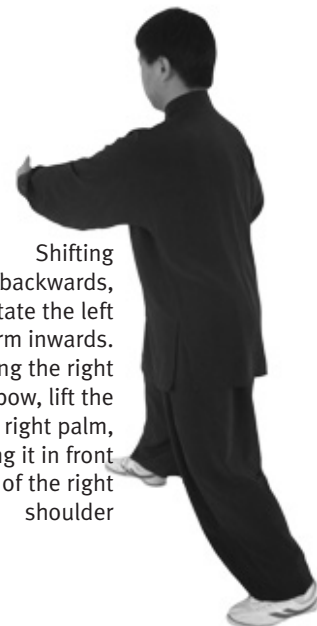
Continue circling both arms. Right arm sweeps down in front of the body, left arm stays open on the left side of the body.



Shifting the weight to the right, right arm circles from left to right, draw in the left arm and settling the wrist stand up the left palm.



Shifting backwards, rotate the left arm inwards. Bending the right elbow, lift the right palm, settling it in front of the right shoulder



Shift forwards to form the bow stance. Circle the right arm downwards and set the right palm by the side of the right knee. Left palm strikes forwards.

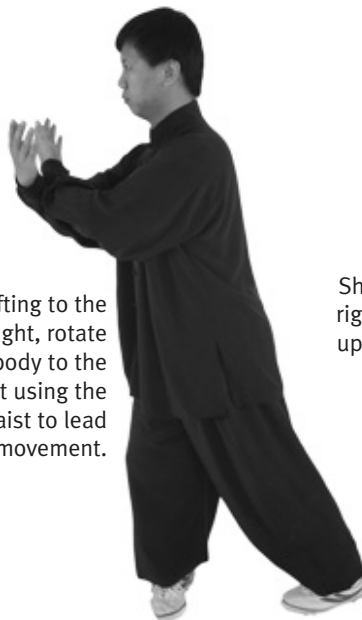
At the same time, right leg steps backwards by ~45°.



Step in with the right foot, both feet shoulder width apart. Cross both arms with the right arm inside of the left.



Body weight placed equally on both legs; ward off both arms upwards, crossing in front on the center line, left arm now inside of the right. Pay attention to extend both elbows outwards.



Shifting to the right, rotate the body to the right using the waist to lead the movement.



Shift backwards, right arm circling upwards and left arm circling downwards.



Pull in the left arm and push the right arm forwards to form the Pull-back.



Rotating to the left, pull back both arms to the left side.



Rotating back to the right, set up the Press by curving the right arm placing the left palm at the middle of the right forearm.

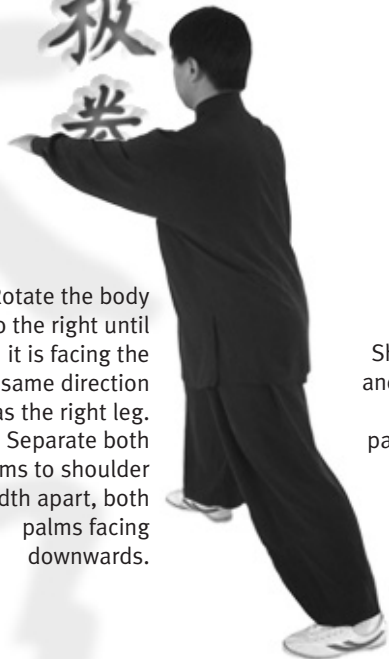


Shifting forwards, extend the arms executing the Press.

Continue to shift back with the weight gradually placed on the back leg.

太极拳

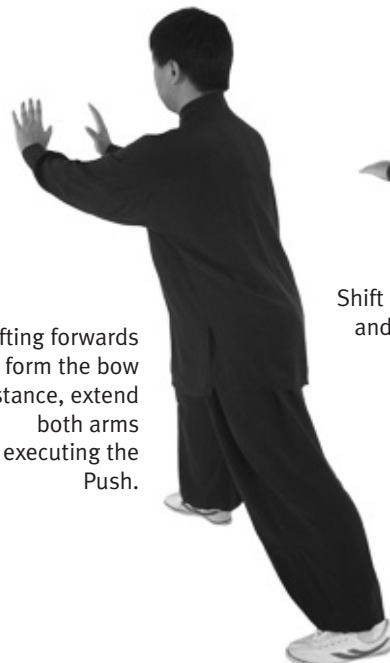
Rotate the body to the right until it is facing the same direction as the right leg. Separate both arms to shoulder width apart, both palms facing downwards.



Shift backwards and draw in both arms, sit both palms in front of the chest.



Shifting forwards to form the bow stance, extend both arms executing the Push.



Shift backwards and level both hands.



Left leg steps to the corner at 45° and ward-off with left arm.



Shifting forwards rotate the left arm and strike out at 45°.



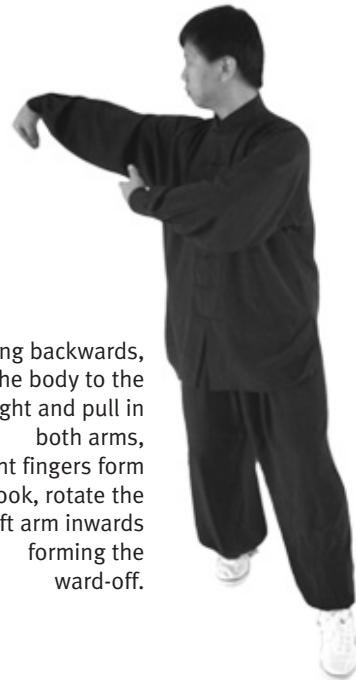
Shift the weight backwards.



Turn to the left with the waist leading the movement, use the left arm to grab and pull.



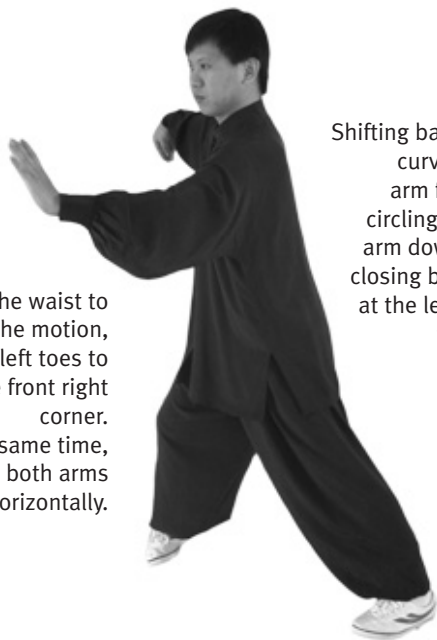
Continue rotating to the left, use the right heel pivot to turn in the toes by 135°. Circle both arms horizontally.



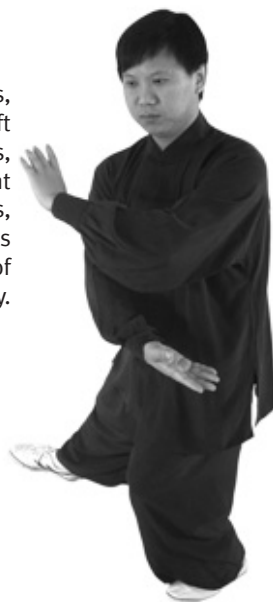
Shifting backwards, turn the body to the right and pull in both arms, right fingers form the hook, rotate the left arm inwards forming the ward-off.



Using the waist to lead the motion, turn in left toes to the front right corner. At the same time, circle both arms horizontally.

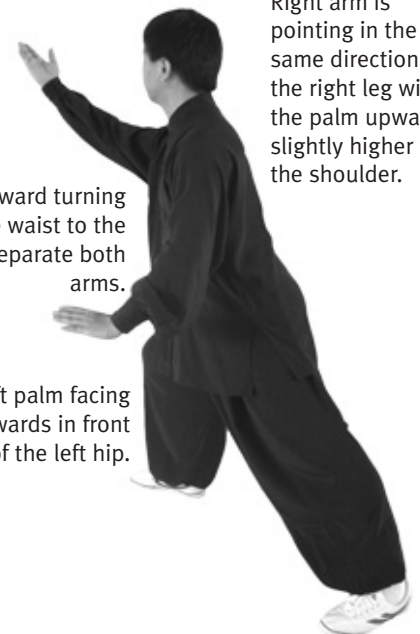


Shifting backwards, curve the left arm forwards, circling the right arm downwards, closing both arms at the left side of the body.



Shift forward turning the waist to the right, separate both arms.

Set left palm facing downwards in front of the left hip.



Right arm is pointing in the same direction as the right leg with the palm upwards slightly higher than the shoulder.

The right leg steps out diagonally a little more than halfway to the back right corner.

Postcard from

Madagascar

By Hugues Raharimanantsoa



Perhaps you do not know where Madagascar is: some locate it in the Caribbean, others in South Asia East but in fact, it is close to East Africa, just besides Mozambique, separated precisely by what is called the "Channel of Mozambique".

Tai Chi Chuan is practised there especially by the Chinese community. The Malagasy people and Europeans have started to practise it within clubs supported by foreign Professors (mainly Chinese or French).

Our club which practises Yang style initially

started in 2001 with the 24 Form then turned resolutely to the Traditional Long Form.

I have been a member of the International Association since 2003. About thirty students join around me in practicing the 103 Form four times per week.

With the help of Duc Nguyen Minh, Director of Yang Chengfu Center in Paris, I took part in the 2004 Seminar in Paris with Master Yang Zhenduo and in 2005 with Master Yang Jun. I try to transmit to the Tai Chi Chuan students, the Form taught by The Masters Yang.

As you may know, the standard of living of Madagascar does not enable us to become today a Yang Chengfu Center approved by International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association. Madagascar is not located in the areas where the seminars are organized so progress in Tai Chi is expensive but later, surely, this investment will bear fruit.

We send our Hello from Madagascar to all members of International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association!



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