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Push Hands: Fundamental Skills and Theory

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Push Hands:

Fundamental Skills and Theory

A conversation with Yang Laoshi, Dave Barrett
and Lance Lu

Explanations of the Push Hands exercise range from the simple: "Push Hands is the mutual exploration of the internal energies and is dependent primarily on the sense of touch. The method involves two people making contact at the arms, adhering to each other, and using the Taiji spiral movements." (Gaffney, pg.150); to the mystical, "...it teaches one to fully realize what sensitivity of the entire body means. Externally, the practitioner develops an acute sense of touch transmitted through the skin. Sensitivity and awareness is also developed internally. The practitioner learns how to empty the body of all force. When one rids the body of all force, one can experience what it is like to be the twinkling distant star; the body is there and yet is not there. Through understanding the principle of Push Hands one can learn to balance Yin and Yang in daily life. Thus the quality of life as a whole is enhanced." (Jou Tsung Hwa, pg.242)

Practicing Push Hands with a well trained player is to bask in the emanations of a fluid, tranquil force.

Practicing with a poorly trained player is a numbing, exhausting experience like being attached to the spin cycle of a washing machine. Sensitivity is the foundation of correct practice, "...to learn to sense out the forcefulness, direction, speed as well as the substantiality or insubstantiality of the opponent's energy to be issued.." (Wang Peisheng, pg. 188). Developing skill in sensing and interpreting energy depends a great deal on the quality of contact and connection between Push Hands partners. In this article we will explore the four key actions that create correct contact. These are found in one of the oldest texts in Taijiquan, "The Song of Pushing Hands" attributed to Wong Zongyue. They are Zhan: to stick, Lian: to connect, Nian: to adhere, and Sui: to follow. These verbs describe not only physical processes; they illuminate certain strategies that lead to successful practice.

This April, in Seattle, after a day long Push Hands Seminar Yang Laoshi sat down with me and Lance Lu to have a conversation about these four key words.



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DB: Yang Laoshi, could you tell us what Zhan means?

YJ: Zhan in English means sticking, with an uprising or pulling up energy. The phrase in Chinese that describes this is: 提 ti 上 shang 拔 ba 高 gao 之 zhi 谓 wei 也 ye. This means you can use sticking to pull up and uproot the opponent. It has this type of feeling. Where do you get the sticking? The energy actually comes from both partners. You give some energy into it and the opponent gives some energy and when the two energies cross you are sticking. This sticking energy comes from the pressure between you and the opponent, then you can lead your opponent upwards. If the opponent does not give you the pressure you cannot stick. You are standing there doing nothing, how can I stick? This is the principle expressed in the phrase, "if the opponent doesn't move, I don't move".

In talking about these four principles we need to understand an important cognitive process: the mind creates the intent, you want to do something; the body creates kinetic motion and understanding is created by feeling. So when the opponent starts to form the intent to do something to you, you already understand it, this is the listening energy.

DB: So this is a process of creating the right contact through sensitivity, using the mind?

YJ: The mind goes first! We have a saying that the mind leads the motion, the body responds to the intent and you start to move. With this method we use the mind first and then the physical sensations from the body to feel your opponent. So that is what is meant by the phrase, "Thinking, moving, knowing, feel it."

DB: These are the elements that go into how to create the correct contact?

YJ: That's right. Why do we want to do it this way? Because we want to know the opponent, to feel the opponent. How can you do this? These four principles Zhan, Lian, Nian and Sui will help you. So why do we want to stick, adhere, connect and follow because we want to feel and know the opponent. Know what? Know



DB: We need to join the opponent's energy to understand their intent. If they are very, very soft we need to be as soft to listen to them, but if we are stiff and tight we can't listen clearly?

YJ: Generally speaking from Taijiquan's principle we don't want to use excessive force. If you use this type of energy it's not good for you because you have no flexibility: you are stiff and unnatural, not moving freely. So your empty and full sides are easily controlled by your opponent. So if your opponent is very, very soft what are you going to do? Actually we can still use softness. Your opponent is soft, you can be even more soft; make it so your opponent cannot be softer than you, then when they start to use force then you can find their center easily.

DB: What happens if you don't have this sticking energy?

YJ: If you have no sticking energy then you are sliding the contact points on each other and also actually you have no controlling ability.

DB: How do we correct this problem? By giving more energy?

YJ: No! The solution is that when you are doing the movements, do not start from your point of view. You have to forget yourself, and let the opponent initiate the movement.

DB: Does this lead us to the principle of Sui or following?

YJ: Actually the four principles can be used in the same situation but to explain different aspects of the Push Hands practice. For example, it doesn't matter if you are following or want to stick. If you don't follow, you can't stick. If your opponent wants to go right and you go left then you separate and lose contact. So if they move right you have to follow. This doesn't mean that you have no choice or influence. If your palm is set correctly you can control your opponent's angles of motion and make them move in the direction you want them to go. So you still have control but are using their motion, changing their moving curves and circles to create a good position for you and a bad one for him.

The Song of Pushing Hands

Revised by Wang Zongyue

*In Ward Off (peng), Roll Back (lu),
Press (ji), and Push (an),
you must be conscientious.
Upper and lower follow one another;
the other has difficulty advancing.*

*Let him come and strike with great
strength. Lead his movement, using
four ounces to deflect a thousand
pounds.*

*Attract him to emptiness, join, then
issue. Adhere, connect, stick, follow,
without letting go or resisting.*

Translated by Louis Swaim in, *Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan*,
Berkeley, Blue Snake Books, 2006, pg.219

your opponent's empty and full, yin and yang, whether the opponent is moving forward or going back, coming at you from left or right, you have to be aware of this.

DB: In order to create this sticking process we need to have the correct pressure?

YJ: You cannot say "correct" pressure; you should say that the pressure is right for you, because with some people they will like heavier or lighter pressure depending on their ability and foundation.

DB: Let's talk more about Sui. In English following means you lead and I go with you. What you are saying is that following also has a control element, that if I maintain contact and use sticking I can follow but also influence the opponent's motion.

YJ: True, but you cannot always follow your opponent. Following is how you deal with them at the beginning, eventually you want to create an advantageous position for yourself. You don't want to follow to the point that you are actually permitting them so far into your center that finally you lose balance. So the phrase in Chinese that explains Sui is: 彼 bi 走 zou 此 ci 应 yin 之 zhi 谓 wei 也 ye. This means that the opponent is doing something to you, how do you respond? This describes how you respond to the initiation of intent by the opponent. To be responsive you need the correct method. Firstly, you cannot resist the opponent and you must follow them but you cannot always follow. You still have to make some changes. How do you make these changes? Adhering also helps.

DB: So now let's talk about Nian or adhering. Is there a Chinese saying about this skill?

YJ: Yes, it's: 溜 liu 恋 lian 缠 qian 绕 quan 之 zhi 谓 wei 也 ye. This is hard to explain but the saying describes the opponent as totally immersed or enclosed in something like a gel or glue. So they can move anywhere but when they move they cannot be free of this contact.

DB: I think I understand, the opponent has freedom of motion?

YJ: That's right, but any motion they make is covered by a pressure. For example if you move in air and then move underwater it's different. Can you do the same thing in air that you can underwater? Yes, but underwater in slow motion maybe it's the same but if you move quickly it feels different underwater than in the air, because of the pressure.

DB: So the adhering skill seems to be more of a free energy in that I'm not trying to lift or stick I'm just trying to create constant contact in any direction.

YJ: That's right: any direction he moves, the opponent is not very free to go. You have adhering to protect you because by adhering eventually you can deflect the opponent's energy away from your center.

DB: What happens if I don't have Nian? I may have sticking contact but if the opponent can shake this contact, I'm in trouble. Is Nian more of a protective energy?

YJ: It's like if you push something in the water as opposed to pushing in the air, what's the difference? Without Nian, this fluid sensation of contact, the opponent can easily move into your center. If you have Nian, there is this pressure that can be used to guide the opponent to the side.

DB: Is this a more responsive type of energy? With Zhan or sticking I initiate the energy but with Nian is this a passive, constant type of feeling?

YJ: Actually with Zhan, it's both because you use a part of your opponent's energy. If they give you nothing you cannot use it. Nian is the same type of thing: if they give you nothing you still cannot redirect them. If something is dropped into a gel it doesn't move, but when it does move, there is a pressure from contact with the gel.

DB: This is an interesting concept: that no matter what direction or speed the contact is constant.

YJ: It doesn't matter what direction, any direction you have adhering. So not just forwards and backwards, that's not the right type of energy.

DB: I've seen some explanations of these four principles that say, for example, Zhan is a vertical energy and the others are lateral or diagonal. It seems so complicated.

YJ: No, no, no. These energies include all directions

DB: The final word we have yet to discuss is Lian or connect. Is there an explanatory phrase for this skill?

YJ: Yes: 舍 she 己 ji 无 wu 离 li 之 zhi 谓 wei 也 ye. This basically describes Lian as forgetting yourself and staying connected with the opponent. Follow your opponent and keep connected with them. Even if they move back you still try to go with them to stay connected. From this connecting skill comes many techniques, for example, being able to borrow the opponent's energy by connecting from forward to back, back to forward, actually this can be used in any direction.

DB: I'm struggling to understand the differences between following and connecting. In English, basically if someone moves away I follow by going after them. But if the opponent is moving in...

YJ: You still have to follow them!

DB: Yes, I suppose...

YJ: If you don't follow them in, then you are resisting!



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DB: I'm glad you mentioned resisting because I wanted to ask you about this last phrase in *The Song of Pushing Hands*, "without letting go or resisting". If we just examine these four principles of sticking, adhering, connecting and following without this last phrase we might lose sight of the whole purpose of developing these skills.

YJ: You know, actually Zhan, Nian, Lian and Sui are techniques that we use in Push Hands but the result is not resisting and not separating with the opponent. The techniques tell you how to use the energy and this phrase, "without letting go or resisting" is the proper result.

DB: Is letting go or losing contact the biggest mistake in Push Hands?

YJ: Yes! If you separate from your opponent you lose all knowledge of their energy and intent. What we want is the mind thinking, the body moving, understanding energy and feeling the opponent; all of this is lost when we separate and lose contact. Why do we need the techniques of Zhan, Nian, Lian and Sui? We want to know the opponent, feel the opponent, and understand the opponent. Then we know how to respond to the opponent. You know the "Song of Pushing Hands" seems quite short but it is very important. It describes how you should practice, what you need to have to practice and finally it describes the strategy you need to succeed. Only six lines but it contains the spirit of Push Hands. Let me give you a free translation of this text. The title actually means the song of striking hands.

DB: Not pushing hands?

YJ: Later on we used this term but these words in the title, Da means strike or beat, Shou means hand. First of all, when you start you have to seriously study ward off, roll back, press, and push. These are the four square energies. When these four energies are done well, combined and coordinated with your upper and lower body movements; the opponent will have a difficult time to come into you, to attack you. The next line means that it doesn't matter how strong the opponent comes at you, you use what strategy? Use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds. Here is this method: how do you use four ounces to do this? Let your opponent deeply in, then guide them to the empty area. So you must use adhering to guide them in. If you aren't adhering to the opponent they will not continue to push you. You connect with and use the opponent's force coming in and then he will fall by himself.

DB: If the opponent feels you have lost adherence he will stop pushing?

YJ: That's right. Because he feels something, he wants to push. He wants to come in, he feels he's almost there, almost there, but still not yet! Then I guide him to the empty space, I remain connected to his energy, linked to his force and I borrow this and release it back out towards him. This is how you borrow the opponent's energy.

DB: Tell us more about this line, "attract him into emptiness."

YJ: Let your opponent in and guide them to the empty area. First you have to make your center secure and stable. Then you try to borrow his energy and bring it back to the opponent explosively. The final line of the Song tells what techniques to use to do this: Zhan, Nian, Lian and Sui and warns against losing contact or resisting.

DB: What is resisting and how do we correct it?

YJ: Resisting can be from two sides: one, from your side, your problem. When the opponent tries to do something, you go straight against them. The other resisting can come from the opponent, meaning that when you want to do something, the opponent won't let you but you still try to do it anyway: this is also resisting. For example, I try one particular technique and you don't let me, I'll change to the next step. If you push to me and I don't let you push, this is resisting. If I try to roll you back and you don't want to be rolled back and you won't let me execute this technique, this is also resisting.

DB: So resisting can come from both partners?

YJ: Yes, actually from the Taiji point of view, the interplay between yin and yang, people need to understand if one technique is a dead end you have to change. From yin to yang, from yang to yin, make it alive, don't get stuck in there, keep it moving, then you will keep the practice alive. If you cross to a dead end, yin cannot change to yang, yang cannot change to yin then there is no more dynamic motion. Force just meets force. Taiji means straight with curve, empty with full; if you are full and I am full, who is yin, who is yang? This is not right and this is resisting.

DB: How do we correct this?

YJ: Use the four principles, these are practical solutions to this problem.

Lance Lu: *Yang Laoshi, what is the best way to develop these techniques, just practice and more practice?*

YJ: Not only practice them but understand them with your mind.



Photography: Steve Pellerin

LL: *You have to think about them on your own?*

YJ: Not just that, you have to understand that these techniques are valuable to you.

LL: *So believe in these techniques?*

YJ: Yes, and it may be more practical than that. Understand that following is a good strategy for you, connecting is a useful skill for you, adhering can help you control your opponent. If you understand that these techniques will work for you then your body will want to do them. Most beginners in Push Hands have this problem: they are too stiff. Something comes at you, you don't know it, can't feel it and the reaction to incoming force is to become tight. You might not even realize this is a reflexive response.

LL: *Yes it's natural to react that way.*

YJ: Your reaction is like that, everybody has this response. But we don't want that: we want softness instead of stiffness.

LL: *So we have to change our natural reaction?*

YJ: Actually from our point of view, yielding is the natural response. What we call pre-natal or natural reaction to incoming force is to yield and follow. What we learn later on, or post-natal, is to resist and become tight. You forget your natural reaction.

LL: *Then as we grow older, we forget this natural response and move away from our Original Nature?*

YJ: Yes! So how do we regain our natural responses and energies? Practice Taijiquan!

POSTSCRIPT BY LANCE LU:

Laoshi's comments have gone a long way in clarifying subtle and elusive concepts, but ultimate clarity will come only after we experience what he is talking about. He's pointed the way to investigate these concepts, but we have to do the work ourselves, take these ideas and verify them in our own bodies. Do the training to get it from our heads into our bodies. Then, we will understand on a deeper level, and maybe clarity will come. It was important for me to delve into how we develop our skills.

In a way, it's a dilemma for all of us who are not at a high level yet. To get the experience into your body, you need your mind to be convinced that these principles will work. Without actually experiencing their efficacy, doubts will remain, and one will resort to the automatic reaction of stiffness. But if one remains stiff, it will be impossible to experience how soft can overcome hard, and how these theories are useful and practical. It's like the "chicken or the egg" type of situation. That's why I brought up "belief" because it seems to me that at some point in pondering these theories, the student has to take a leap of faith. Laoshi's contention that our automatic response was not our original or natural response is also an article of faith. Since everyone reacts automatically with stiffness when attacked, it is easy to conclude that this is our "natural" response. The tenacity of this response and the difficulty of breaking this habit further supports this notion. There is no empirical way to prove what our original (pre-natal) nature is, so in the end, we have to believe it, and try to reprogram ourselves and see what happens.

Zhan, Lian, Nian and Sui

AN ANNOTATED LEXICON

CHARACTER ANALYSIS BY ANDY LEE AND SARAH OLSEN

Commentary Compiled by Dave Barrett

ZHAN 粘

"Zhan is an energy that finds and connects with a partner's energy"

Gaffney, pg 163

"Zhan means that when you and your opponent touch each other, you must maintain contact at all times, never separating from each others touch and never allowing the energy between the two of you to be blocked"

Zhang Yun, The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, pg32

"Stick to Upward': stick to the opponent and raise him up for the sake of dislocating his center of gravity, chiefly with the hands and arms but possibly with other parts of the body as the situation demands"

Yearning K. Chen, pg. 163

"Zhan means that the opponent can be raised upwards and thus uprooted."

Olson, pg 49

"The original meaning of Zhan is to paste or stick something up. In Taijiquan practice it means to get your opponent to follow you a while under your control. It looks as if your opponent is stuck to your hand or any other part of your body"

Zhang Yun, Four key skills for Push Hands and fighting, pg35

"One's palms are, so to speak, weightlessly glued to the partner like a shadow to its object or an echo to the sound."

Cheng Man Ching, Tai Chi Chuan, a simplified method, pg.18

LIAN 连

"Lian is an energy that links and joins with a partner's energy"

Gaffney, pg. 163

"Join the opponent in every moment of the struggle, let him take the lead but never leave him, simply dragging on to tire him out and expose his weak points."

Yearning K. Chen, pg. 163

"Lian means continually using your Jin, your internal force, never letting it break while you are in contact with your opponent. When you touch the opponent, never let him break away from your Lian."

Zhang Yun, The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, pg32

"In addition to direction, proximity, body method and stance, one must in particular join together with the opponent. Otherwise the Ti Jin (lifting energy) technique will have no effect; the use of this method must be adapted to circumstances. To get the upper hand in the use of Ti, it comes after leading the opponent, then it matters not which energy-any of them could be used to strike and the opponent will most certainly be dispatched. This is what is meant by the phrase in The Song of Pushing Hands, 'Lead (him) into emptiness, join, then issue.'"

Chen Yanlin, quoted in Swaim, pg.204-205

"The original meaning of Lian is to continue or link. There are two meanings of Lian in Taijiquan practice. They are to continually follow and change. The first one means that you maintain continual contact by following your opponent and never letting him leave. The other idea of Lian means to continually change as you are following. That means each of your techniques are joined together like the links of a chain, never breaking your mind and movements and never giving you opponent any chance to change."

Zhang Yun, Four key skills for Push Hands and fighting, pg36.

NIAN 黏

"Nian adheres to and joins with a partners energy"

Gaffney, pg163

"Nian is the ability to follow so closely when the opponent retreats that one is attached like a shadow to him"

Chen Yanlin, The Tao of Tai Chi Chuan, pg220

"If the opponent retreats, to adhere to him tenaciously is to render him in a disadvantageous position and to place him under one's control."

Lee Ying-arm, pg36

"It is said in The Tai Chi classics that to remain in the most advantageous position and leave one's opponent at a disadvantage is called Nian."

Jou Tsung Hwa, pg.244

"Nian, or cohering, means continually guiding the movements of your opponent so he cannot escape your control. Paradoxically you do this by following the movements he makes."

Zhang Yun, The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, pg32

"One should let some part of his arm, by his keen sense of touch, get adhered to his opponents. And in this state of adherence, one should follow the opponent's movement, at the same time issue a very slight amount of energy to try and drive the opponent into a disadvantageous or unstable position."

Wang Peisheng, pg.191

"While engaging the opponent in a struggle, attach to his movements in order not to let him get away."

Yearning K.Chen, pg.163

"Nian means to have no separation from the opponent so that you may interpret his movement and intent."

Olson, pg. 49

"The original meaning of Nian is to stick, adhere, or paste to. In Taijiquan practice it means to keep in contact with your opponent and through this contact to make him feel uncomfortable. Keep this contact and never let him go away. It is like something adheres to his body."

Zhang Yun, Four key skills for Push Hands and fighting, pg36.

SUI 随

"Forgetting oneself and following others is what is meant by Following. In other words if the opponent does not move, I don't move."

Cheng Man Ching, Advanced Tai Chi Form Instructions, pg. 36

"Sui follows and pursues a partner's energy."

Gaffney, pg.163

"Follow up the opponent's movements and the direction of his force and watch for an opportunity to attack him; stand still if he does not move, advance if he retreats and special emphasis is placed on how you take your steps. An advancing step must be taken to your advantage and to the disadvantage of your opponent."

Yearning K. Chen, pg 164

"Follow means to adapt and change to the conditions and situation, that a good opportunity may be created."

Olson, pg. 49

"The original meaning of Sui is to follow or obey. In Taijiquan practice that means to follow your opponent's movement or mind. According to Taijiquan principles, you should avoid going directly against the opponent with your force. You should make the

粘、沾、連、隨、

粘者，提上拔高之謂也；
沾者，溜縫縫綫之謂也；
連者，捨己無離之謂也；
隨者，彼走此應之謂也。

opponent feel as if he can get you, but do not really let him get you. The most common misunderstanding is to think that Sui just means following or obeying the opponent. It is just like another classical sentence which says, "To follow your opponent is intended to finally let him follow you." A real Sui skill must include this idea."

Zhang Yun, Four key skills for Push Hands and fighting, pg.32

"Sui means to avoid resisting, that is you must always follow your opponent's movements so he cannot beat you or escape from your control. In this process you should first follow your opponent completely, but then occasionally give him the sense that you have the ability to apply some internal force. It is said, "Forget yourself and just follow your opponent then you can control him." Just following the opponent's energy is a purely yin process. Used alone it will make you weak or "soft" and too passive. The occasional appearance of internal resistance introduces yang energy and thus creates Sui, which is Taiji."

Zhang Yun, The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, pg.32

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Zhan - Analysis of 粘

CHARACTER		SPELLING		KANJI REBUS		GENEALOGY
SIMPLIFIED	TRADITIONAL	PINYIN	RADICAL	PHONETIC	ETYMOLOGY	
粘	粘	Zhān	米 Mǐ. Pictograph of four grains of rice (𥼶) scattered due to thrashing (+).	占 Zhān. Cracks in tortoise shell; to divine: Prophesize.	Paste up; (Modern Chinese 粘连-zhānlián= Medical Adhesion)	

Zhan1 has as its radical Mi3 with the phonetic Zhan1. Mi3 is a picture of grains of rice threshed in all directions. The top of Zhan1 (扌) represents cracks in a tortoise shell which resulted when it was heated. The divine prediction was then spoken out loud with the mouth (口) after close study of the cracks.

Lian - Analysis of 连

CHARACTER		SPELLING		KANJI REBUS		GENEALOGY
SIMPLIFIED	TRADITIONAL	PINYIN	RADICAL	PHONETIC	ETYMOLOGY	
连	連	Lián	辵 Chí is a pictograph of a person taking a small step. (彳)	車 Chē. Pictograph of a chariot viewed from above, with wheels at top and bottom. Without phonetic force.	Moving, connect, join, successively with, including	

The radical for Lian2 is Chuo4 (辵). This ancient rebus was a combination of road (辵) step (彳) and feet or stop (止). (車) is a carriage or vehicle seen from above, showing the body (田), axle (丨) and wheels (二). The Shuo Wen says that the character represents a string of carriages moving along as if connected. Carts moving leave a continuous track, not broken like the tracks of man.

Nian - Analysis of 黏

CHARACTER		SPELLING		KANJI REBUS		GENEALOGY
SIMPLIFIED	TRADITIONAL	PINYIN	RADICAL	PHONETIC	ETYMOLOGY	
黏	黏	Nián	黍 Shǔ. Glutinous millet; grain put in water to ferment	占 Diǎn. Sticky, stick (Cantonese pronunciation: Dim)	Stick, glue, paste	

Nian2's radical is shu3. Shu3 or millet was the principal crop of the Shang Dynasty. The Shang people would use leftover millet to make wine. The ancient form of Shu3 is composed of ripe ears of grain, Hez (禾) and water, Shui3 (水). The phonetic component is Zhan.

Sui - Analysis of 隨

CHARACTER		SPELLING		KANJI REBUS		GENEALOGY
SIMPLIFIED	TRADITIONAL	PINYIN	RADICAL	PHONETIC	ETYMOLOGY	
隨	隨	Suí	辵 is an extended step or stride. Commonly termed "walking component" indicating objects having to do with road and walking.	隋 Duò/Suí to follow; name as in Súi Dynasty (duò suggests opposing action)	Move, follow; accompany; comply with.	

The phonetic suiz has as its radical fu4 (阜). The character is still in use and means high place, mound. This phonetic is based on duo4. Duo4 means to build a mound of earth around a city. The other radical zuo3 (左) means left handed and may indicate a great many enemy soldiers suggesting that the action is contrary. Adding the Chuo (辵) radical could indicate "following around" the fortifications. The simplified version uses (有) "You3".



Master Wu Wenhan

A Brief Introduction

Wu Wenhan,
Translated by Mui Gek Chan

Wu Wenhan was born in 1928 in Nanhe County, Hebei. He was a Communist Party member and worked in politics and law for a long time. In 1989, he left his position for some rest and relaxation. When he was young, he studied with martial arts teacher, Li Shengduan of Xingtai National Arts Research Institute. He went through many years of training, research, and learned a great deal. In 1986, 1989, and 2006 he represented the Wu/Hao style of Taijiquan and participated in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd National Taijiquan Symposium. The papers he represented were published in the Wulin magazine. In early December 2001, he participated as the Wu/Hao style specialist in the “Taiji Great Performances” organized by the Hongkong government. This work made it into the Guinness Book of Records. In September 2002, he led and participated in a Taiji friendship meet organized by China’s Martial Arts Institute for the countries of China, Japan, and Korea. In December 2003, being the leading Wu/Hao style Taijiquan expert, he was invited to Guangdong’s Huanan Shifan University’s “Taijiquan International Forum”, and in July 2006 the “Taijiquan International Forum” held in Canada. In the late September, 2006 he attended the “2006 International Taijiquan Friendship Meet” in Handan. The meeting was organized by China’s Sports and Martial Arts Department, China’s Wu Association, Handan government, Hebei Sports Department, and Hebei Martial Arts Association. In addition, he has been invited many times to participate in Taijiquan friendship meets and forums organized by various provinces. He was Wu/Hao style’s coach for

the 2nd and 3rd World Taijiquan Meet. He is the honorary president of the Wu style Research Institute of Beijing, Jilin, and Zhengzhou. He is Shijiazhuang, Hebei Wu/Hao style Taijiquan special committee’s coach, North America’s Wu/Hao style Taijiquan association’s honorary president, and other Taijiquan styles’ organizing consultant. He is the special editor to “Wushu Jianshen” magazine and an editing staff member of “Wuhun” magazine. On occasions, for “Zhongguo Taijiquan” he has served as the magazine’s editing staff member, “Taiji” magazine’s special editing staff member, “Yongnian Taijiquan” magazine’s consultant, and Hongkong’s “Zhongguo Gongfu”, a Chinese/English magazine’s consultant. His contacts with qualified writers both domestic and overseas enable him to edit and publish a great number of specialized works, thereby nurturing a cadre of younger writers. He has published close to two hundred essays in major magazines and newspapers relating to martial arts history, Taiji’s historical facets, Wu/Hao style research, famous experts, anecdotes, and ethical philosophy. In doing so, he has helped the development of Chinese culture and the popularization of Chinese martial arts; thereby, earning himself the name, “Wulin Yizhibi”. His published works include “The Complete Wu Style Taijiquan Manual” and “Wu Wenhan Wushu Wencun”. His students and their students have taught domestically and overseas and have achieved good results in various competitions. In 1998, in the 5th Yongnian International Taijiquan Friendship Meet, he was awarded the “Special Teacher” title. In 2002, he received the “Meritorious Service” award at the Yongnian International Taijiquan Friendship Meet. ☯

The Birth of Taijiquan

A conversation with Master Wu Wenhan

By Dave Barrett, Translated by Yang Jun



Dave Barrett: In America many people are unfamiliar with the Wu/Hao style of Taijiquan. I wanted to begin by asking you to describe the differences between Yang style and Wu/Hao style Taijiquan.

Wu Wenhan: Let me answer your question in two parts. First let me tell you why our style is called Wu/Hao. In the middle of the Qing dynasty in Hebei Province, Yongnian County, Guangfu town had two famous Taiji masters; one was Yang Luchan (1799-1873), and the other Wu Yuxiang (1813-1880). Let me tell you how Wu Yuxiang created his style. Master Wu's family was in service to the government and Wu Yuxiang had placed highly in the Imperial examination. In the Wu family, both my grandfathers were highly placed civil servants, almost like generals. At that time Yang Luchan returned from his studies with Chen Changxin. So Yang Luchan's job was teaching Taijiquan in his hometown and he and Wu Yuxiang became good friends. At this time there was no special term for Taijiquan. The Chen style was referred to as Long Fist, in Yongnian County the term was Cotton Fist or Sticking Fist. So after Master Wu Yuxiang learned from the Yang family, he went back to Wenxian County, Zhaobao town and found a master named Chen Qingping (1795-1868). During that time Wu Yuxiang's brother, Wu Changxin found a book in a salt shop by Wang Zongyue called the Taiji Classics. So he gave this book to Wu Yuxiang and he brought it back to our hometown. From this point both Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang

began to follow the theories in this book, also they brought their local culture and martial styles together. Actually, they also combined what they had learned from Chen Changxin and Chen Qingping, they combined many things together

with the theory of Wang Zongyue to create a new martial art we now call Taijiquan. Later on Yang Luchan went to Beijing and began teaching and from this point Taijiquan began to spread out.

For the second part of my answer I'd like to talk about the differences between the Yang and Wu/Hao styles. Masters Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang were very good friends, studied and practiced together, sharing their knowledge. Using Wang Zongyue's theories, they created Taijiquan. Using what they learned in Chenjiagou and Zhaobao, combined with local Yongnian techniques, guided by Wang Zongyue's theories they began to change these styles by taking out the jumping and stamping techniques, hard and fast movements. They replaced these with an emphasis of softness.

DB: Was it at this time that the motions became much slower?

WW: Yes. This was a gradual process, it didn't happen overnight. At the beginning both Yang and Wu styles had some jumping movements but they had already taken out the stamping techniques.

DB: Why did they take these type of motions out?

WW: They were influenced by Wang Zongyue's concepts, which formed a new base and foundation for the motions. Of course they learned from the Chen style but at that time Wang Zongyue's book was unknown to the Chen masters. This is an important point: martial arts need a theoretical base for the practice to develop. Secondly how do you show it? Perform it? Both the Yang and Wu styles developed here in Yongnian County started by using the Chen form, "Lazy about Tying the Coat" which evolved into our Grasping the Bird's Tail and finished with Bend the Bow Shoot the Tiger, so they are similar in structure from start to finish. The old Chen style started from Warrior Pounds the Pestle and it was a different sequence. Later Wu Jianquan (1870-1942) and Sun Lutang (1861-1932) developed their styles from a Yang family foundation so their forms sequences are somewhat similar.

The third point I'd like to make concerns Push Hands. In the Chen style, when they used this in the old days it was a very basic technique: just moving back and forth. Bringing this basic exercise back to Guangfu town, Yang Luchan began to develop more detailed techniques. The Yang family made it's living from teaching martial arts, they had a very rich experience and effective training methods. The Wu/Hao style also developed more complex Push Hands patterns. They contributed a good deal to the development of Push Hands and weapons training. We should say that Wu Yuxiang and Yang Luchan founded Taijiquan.

DB: These two gentlemen were close friends, they lived in the same town, did they work together to create the form sequences we have today?

WW: Yes. They worked together and used many of the same form names and although the two styles are different they share many similarities.

DB: The reason I ask is that many students might think Taijiquan came just from Yang Luchan and we should recognize and celebrate the contributions of the Wu family to Taijiquan's development.

WW: The reason perhaps why the contributions of the Wu family are not so well known is that the Yang family were professional martial arts teachers. The Wu family was not dependent on teaching for their livelihood. The relationship between the families was quite close. Because of this friendship actually when Yang Luchan went to Beijing to teach he was introduced by Wu Yuxiang's brother.

DB: Was that how Yang Luchan gained entry into the Forbidden City?

WW: Actually Wu Yuxiang's brother worked in the legal system and introduced him to the Imperial Guards as a martial arts teacher; without this family friendship there would have been no such introduction.



DB: This is a very important part of the history of Taijiquan's development.

WW: Let me tell you about why our style is called Wu/Hao Taijiquan. The Wu family was quite rich and part of the local aristocracy. They didn't teach Taijiquan for a living. They were well educated and came from a long line of military men. Because of this background Wu Yuxiang loved to research martial arts. Later on during the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) many towns had to organize protective forces against the rebels. Wu Yuxiang led this organizing effort in Guangfu town.

DB: During the Taiping Rebellion did the Wu family train the townspeople of Guangfu using these new techniques?

WW: According to historical records we have no clear picture as to whether this training was done. One of Wu Yuxiang's nephews was in the military and trained his soldiers. The Qing government gave Wu Yuxiang a special title for his service during the Taiping Rebellion.

So this was Wu Yuxiang's special character, he loved to research martial arts and he was a leading figure in Yongnian. Later on he had three disciples. The first was Li Yiyu (1832-1892), his oldest nephew, the second was also his nephew Li Qishen, they were brothers and also Yang Banhou (1837-1892), Yang Luchan's second son. Because Yang Luchan was in Beijing, his family remained in Guangfu town. Yang Banhou was tutored by Wu Yuxiang who also taught him Taijiquan. This is why the Yang family historically had two styles one called the large frame and the other small frame. When Yang Banhou was twenty he went to Beijing and he also was a military instructor who rose to the sixth rank out of seven.

Wu Yuxiang remained in Guangfu town and continued to research and develop Taijiquan Theory. Taiji's theory comes from three sources; first is Wang Zongyue, second is Wu Yuxiang and the third is Li Yiyu. Li Yiyu was not a professional martial arts person but he had a disciple: Hao Weizhen (1849-1920). Hao He was his styled name. He spread Wu style to the public.

DB: Was he the same generation as Yang Chengfu, teaching at the same time?

WW: Yes they were the same generation but Hao Weizhen was a bit older than Yang Chengfu. So this is why our style is called Wu/Hao because Hao Weizhen was the one who taught publicly also we needed a way to distinguish this in English from the other Wu style developed by Wu Jianquan. The first Wu style Taijiquan manual was written by Hao Weizhen's grandson, Hao Shaoru. The difference between the Yang and Wu families is that the Yang Family taught from generation to generation and the family developed this art. Wu Yuxiang's style or the Wu/Hao style was not passed through this family process, because they did not teach for a living. Actually, the Wu style developed by Hao Weizhen

passed through three generations. The second generation teacher was Hao Yueru (1877-1935), he first taught in Yongnian and later he went to Shanghai. The third generation master, Hao Shaoru (1907-1983) also went to Shanghai. So this Wu style was spread by the Hao family. This is my answer to your first question. The reason Taijiquan is so popular and successful comes from the collaboration between Wu Yuxiang and Yang Luchan. Since Yang Luchan, the Yang style has developed practical training methods which work quite well. The Wu/Hao contribution has been to develop the theories of Taijiquan. The latter generations of these two families also worked together to combine practice and theory and improve the level of training.

Here in Yongnian County, Taijiquan developed not just by continuing Chen style techniques. They learned from the Chen system but they redesigned and created new forms. This is of particular interest to me and I spend my time researching the development of Taijiquan. How do we distinguish between different martial arts? First we examine theory. Secondly, the performance of the forms is considered. Thirdly, what are the teaching methods? These three points help us evaluate the differences. For example, many sports use balls: basketball, baseball, and ping pong, what are the differences? The rules are different, the games are different and the training is different. This is what I mean, there are so many types of Chinese martial arts but how do we say one is Ba Gua and the other is Shaolin? Because of these three points. From my point of view Taijiquan was not simply originated in Chenjiagou. After our two ancestors came back from studying Chen style they created a new martial art called Taijiquan and Guangfu town was its birthplace. Of course there is a relationship with the Chen style but it was not just a simple transition. Later on, when Chen Fake was teaching in Beijing in the 1950's, there were debates as to whether his style was really Taijiquan because the three criteria were so different. What was missing from the Chen style were any of the 13 kinetic energies and theories from Wang Zongyue.

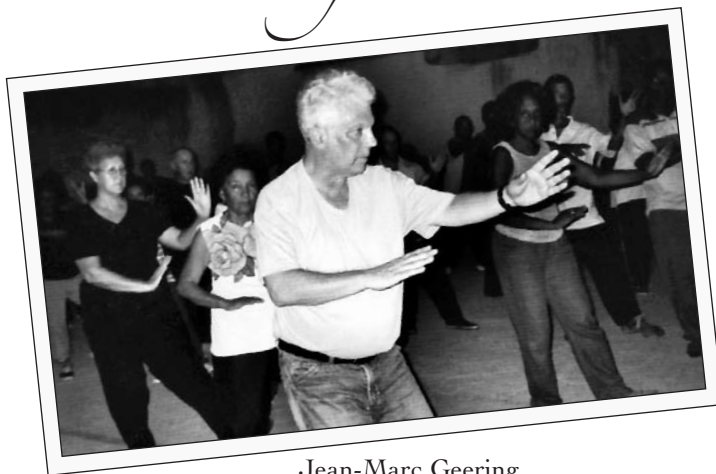
DB: I just have one more question: in your research, Wu Laoshi, what have you learned about Wang Zongyue? Where was he from? Do we know anything about his background and training?

WW: The question cannot be answered clearly. We know only a few basic facts. He was from Shanxi Province. He lived during the Qianlong era of the Qing Dynasty (1736-1796). His theories were based on local Shanxi martial arts. What we have today is only his theory, nothing about the actual performance of his techniques. Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang used these theories, combined with what they had learned from the Chen family to create Taijiquan. They continued to develop this new style using Wang Zongyue's theories.

DB: Thank you so much for your time and insight into the history of Taijiquan!



Playing the guitar in Santiago de Cuba



Jean-Marc Geering
Disciple of Master Yang Zhen duo.
Former Center Director, Switzerland

I have known Cuba for quite some time and have experienced the changes that have taken place. Yoga and Tai Chi were unknown in the years 1979-1983 but when I returned in 2002 and afterwards I noticed that Tai Chi Chuan was part of everyday life.

In 2005, I met some Tai Chi practitioners and gave them my first lesson (the 10 principles). This year I met them again. They practiced some short forms and as I had not much time I proposed the 13 form. First we trained with the 8 brocade qi gong. After some time, the daylight faded but I encouraged them to practice on. We managed through playing the pipa and their spirited farewell: "laoshi zai jian" was a promise to meet again in the future.



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 5

A series of essays by Holly Sweeney,
Director, Montclair Center, New Jersey

PART V

A Brief Review

So far in our series, we have looked at three of the 10 Essentials and introduced several key concepts from the science of biomechanics. It is important to keep these concepts in mind as we continue on our exploration of the 10 Essentials. Here's what we have learned so far:

The smallest functional unit of both movement and posture is **The Motor Unit**. A motor unit is a nerve cell and all the muscle fibers that are stimulated by that nerve. When we practice the smooth continuous movements of Tai Chi Chuan, our bodies are stimulated to maintain more motor units because the production of slow smooth movements requires large numbers of motor units. This has an enormous benefit to our health because it is normal to lose motor units as we grow older. When we lose motor units, we lose muscle mass and muscle control. It is widely recognized that the most effective way to increase strength

and balance in older adults is to practice activities that increase motor unit recruitment. The practice of Tai Chi requires recruitment of large numbers of motor units, which means that more motor units will be created and maintained even as we age. ⁽¹⁾

The next functional unit of movement and posture we studied was **The Muscle/Tendon Unit**. Muscles are "active" elastic tissues and tendons are "passive" elastic tissues. Muscles change their shape when they are stimulated by nerves; tendons change their shape when a pulling force acts upon them. Tendons connect muscles to bones or other tendons; they also make the actions of our muscles more powerful by storing the force of our muscle contractions. The more slowly a muscle contraction is performed, the more energy is transferred to the tendon part of the unit. This increases the strength of the whole muscle/tendon unit and conditions the tendons to have a wide range of "viscoelastic"

properties. Well-conditioned tendons reduce our chances of injury and increase the efficiency of our muscles. Practicing standing postures and doing our forms very slowly helps to keep our tendons conditioned. ⁽²⁾ The viscoelastic properties of tendons make them stiffen or stretch depending on how a load is placed upon them.

Unlike tendons, muscles can actually generate force because of their ability to contract. That is why they are referred to as "active" elastic tissues. We use the term "contraction" to explain what muscles do but the term is a little misleading. We tend to think of "contract" as meaning "get shorter" but when muscles "contract" they can get shorter, get longer, or stay the same length. "Contract" refers to the action of filaments inside the muscles. These filaments, actin and myosin, hook on to each other to produce different kinds of contractions. When muscles are at "resting length", meaning they are neither stretched longer nor

pulled shorter, they have the most actin and myosin bonds. The implications of this are HUGE because it means **muscles are strongest at their resting length**. This fact helps us to understand the meaning and importance of “relaxation” when we are practicing our Tai Chi forms.⁽³⁾

We looked at all the little parts that provide us with movement: the motor units, the muscles, and the tendons. Next came the mystery of how all these little parts work together to create a whole structure which can move and maintain shape at the same time. The answer to this mystery is **Tensegrity Structure**: structure maintained by tension. Tension, exerted by our elastic tissues, is what stabilizes our structure and keeps it from falling apart when we move. Changing the amount of tension exerted by various muscles allows the whole structure to go into movement.⁽⁴⁾

To understand how a tensegrity structure works, it is helpful for us to visualize a structure which is familiar to all of us. Imagine a spider’s web. The spider builds her web by attaching her elastic silk to something, let’s say a window frame in our house. When she’s finished, her web stretches across the whole window frame and has a certain beautiful shape which is maintained by the tension of all the threads of silk. However, if any of the treads that attach the web to the window frame get torn, the whole web will sag and lose its functional structure. Using this image, we can visualize our structure as a complex “web” of elastic strands connected to our bones. When the elastic strands are sagging (not enough tension being generated) our structure is not well-supported. When the elastic strands are too tight (too much tension being generated) it is difficult to move. When the elastic strands have just the right amount of tension, we can maintain our posture and move at the same time in a way that feels comfortable.



The 10 Essentials provide us with guidelines that help us to operate our structure with just the right amount of tension in the right places at the right time.*

**Remember, we use the term “tension” from the science of physics where tension means “a pulling force”. This is not the same “tension” we use to describe a headache or our reaction to stress. In physics, “tension” does not have a negative connotation, it simply means a pulling force.*

The spider’s web is under tension, that’s what gives her web structural integrity. We, too, are continually under the active and passive tensions of our elastic tissues. This kind of tension is a good thing, without it, we would not have form or capability for volitional movement.

In the most recent essay of this series, we looked at the principle of “containing the chest and lifting up the back”. When we embody this principle, we intentionally distribute tension through our structure to achieve a pattern that establishes a beneficial position of our rib cage relative to our vertebral column. This constructive pattern of tension helps us to extend the vertebral column, allowing more upright posture. It also allows our diaphragm muscle to function more efficiently, enhancing our breathing capabilities.⁽⁵⁾

When we looked at this essential principle, “Contain the chest and lift up the back,” from the viewpoint of biomechanics and the physics of tensegrity structure, we could see this principal recommended a specific distribution of tension through our bodies which helped us cultivate upright posture and efficient breathing. However we have to be very

careful in the way we interpret the meaning of “tension”. We may think we have to feel tense when we activate our muscles and tendons. This kind of thinking will get us into a lot of trouble. Figure 1 shows a Tai Chi player interpreting the principle of “contain the chest” with way too much tension pulling his chest downward and inward. He doesn’t feel comfortable, he feels a lot of tension! In Figure 2, the same player contains his chest with less tension, now he feels lighter and more balanced. Remember, a tensegrity structure is strongest when the tension acting on it is balanced throughout the whole structure. When the amount of tension acting on different parts of our structure is even, we don’t feel individual tensions, we feel balanced. When we feel balanced and light in our movements, in means we have the right amount of tension, acting at the right places, at the right time. If we are feeling tension in a certain area, it means we have too much tension somewhere, rather than a balanced action of tension. This is extremely important to understand as we apply the 10 Essentials in our practice. The paradox is: when the amount of tension is right, we won’t feel it as tension, we will feel it as comfort.

In the next essay in this series, we will look at “sink the shoulders and drop the elbows”, to explore further what it means to have the right amount of tension, in the right place, at the right time. ☯

1. *The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association*, #16. Pgs. 14-16.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. *Ibid.* #18. Pgs. 18 – 19
 4. *Ibid.* #19. Pgs. 10 – 12
 5. *Ibid.* #20. Pgs. 10 - 12



From #57 Right Wild Horse Parts Mane #58 Left Wild Horse Parts Mane #59 Right Wild Horse Parts Mane #60 Grasp the Bird's Tail

太極拳

Begin transition from right wild horse parts mane by shifting slightly backwards.



Continue to shift weight backwards, use waist to turn body to the right, slightly open right foot to the right.



Shift weight forwards and turn body to the right. With waist turning, rotate right arm until right palm is facing downwards, circle left arm to body's right side. At the same time, lift up left leg and draw in left foot.



Continue turning body to the right, close both arms on the right side of the body. At the same time left leg steps towards the left corner.



Continue turning body to the left; close both arms on the left side of the body. At the same time right leg steps towards the right corner.



Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance. Turn body to the right and separate both arms.



Shift weight backwards.



Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance. Turn body to the left and separate both arms.



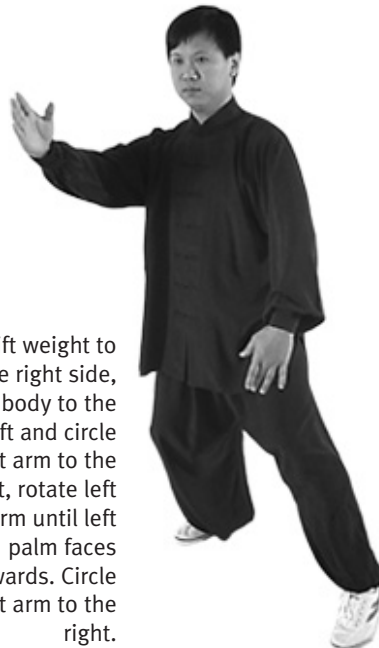
Slightly shift weight backwards, use waist to turn body to the left, slightly open left foot to the left.



Shift weight forwards and turn body to the left. Following waist turning, rotate left arm until left palm is facing downwards, circle right arm to body's left side. At the same time, lift up right leg and draw in right foot.



Use waist to turn body to the left, turn in right leg, pivoting on right heel, by 45°. Basically the upper body stays unchanged.



Shift weight to the right side, turn body to the left and circle right arm to the left, rotate left arm until left palm faces inwards. Circle left arm to the right.

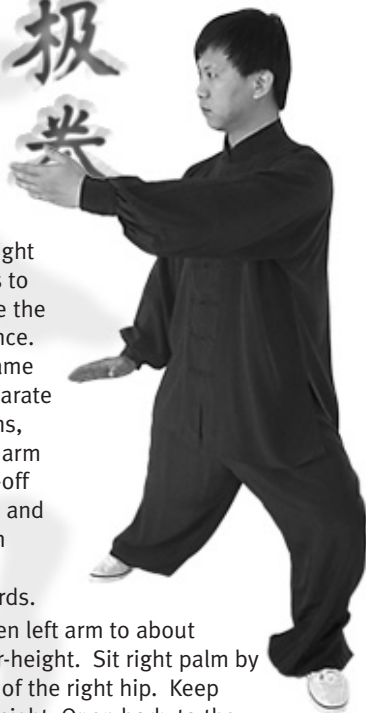


Close both arms on the right side of body, at the same time left leg steps forwards.

太极拳

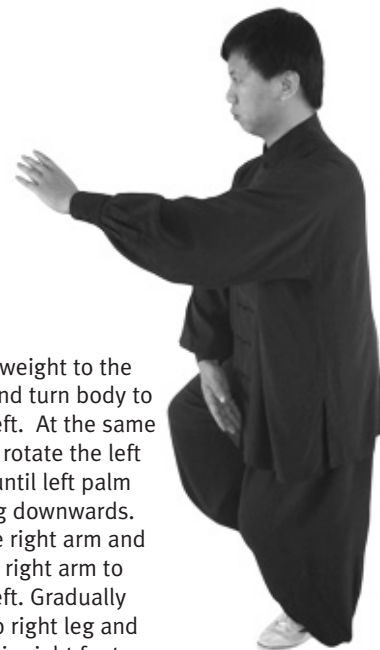
Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance. At the same time separate both arms, with left arm warding-off upwards and right arm pressing downwards.

Straighten left arm to about shoulder-height. Sit right palm by the side of the right hip. Keep body straight. Open body to the corner by more than 45°.

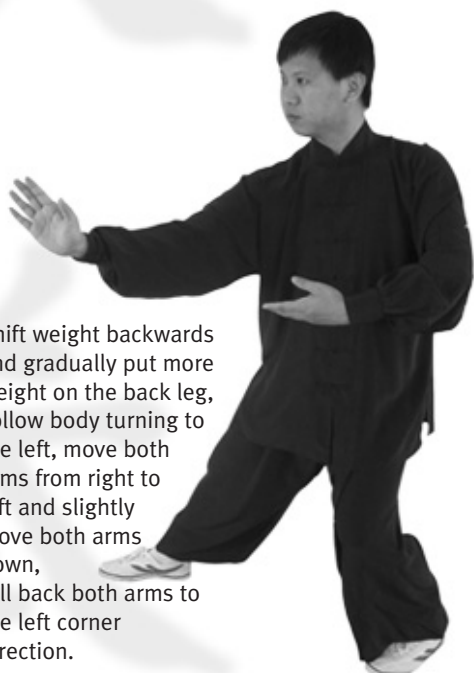


Slightly shift weight backwards, turn body to the right. Use waist to turn in left leg, pivoting on left heel.

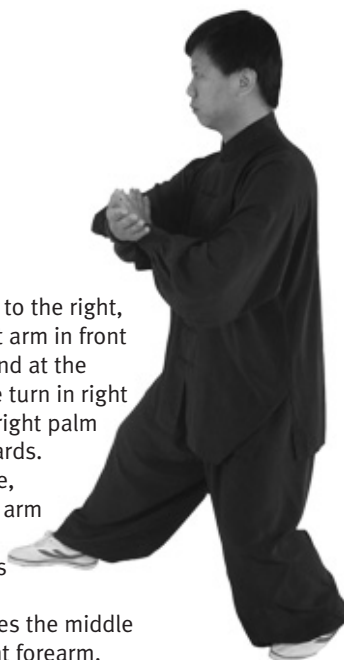
Shift weight to the left and turn body to the left. At the same time, rotate the left arm until left palm facing downwards. Curve right arm and circle right arm to the left. Gradually lift up right leg and draw in right foot.



Shift weight backwards and gradually put more weight on the back leg. Follow body turning to the left, move both arms from right to left and slightly move both arms down, roll back both arms to the left corner direction.



Turn body to the right, bring right arm in front of body, and at the same time turn in right arm until right palm faces inwards. Meanwhile, rotate left arm until left palm faces outwards and presses the middle of the right forearm.



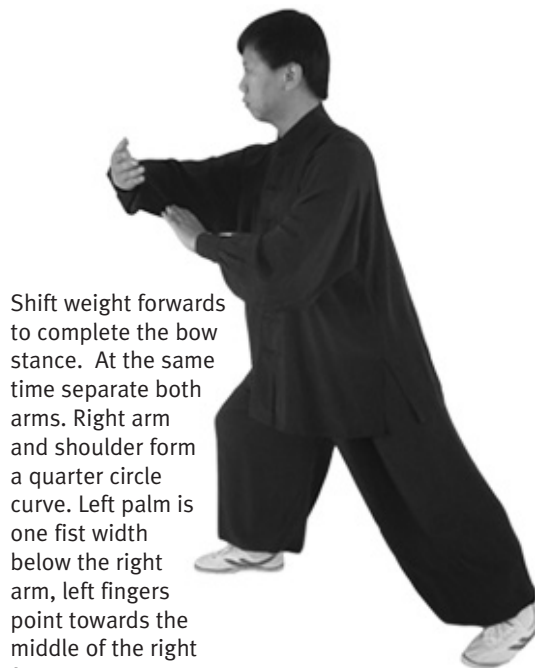
Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance. At the same time press both arms forward.



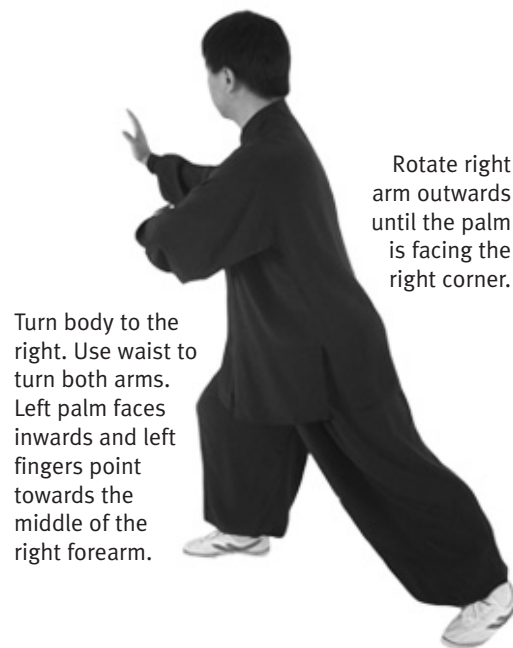


Continue turning body to the left, close both arms by body's left side

...close both arms to the body's left side. At the same time step forward with the right foot, keeping it shoulder width apart.



Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance. At the same time separate both arms. Right arm and shoulder form a quarter circle curve. Left palm is one fist width below the right arm, left fingers point towards the middle of the right forearm.



Turn body to the right. Use waist to turn both arms. Left palm faces inwards and left fingers point towards the middle of the right forearm.

Rotate right arm outwards until the palm is facing the right corner.



Turn body square to the front and separate both arms at the same time. Keep arms shoulder-width apart with palms facing down.



Shift weight backwards and at the same time bring in both arms, sit both palms.



Push arms forward to shoulder-height and keep hands shoulder-width apart.

Body keeps facing forwards.

Shift weight forwards to complete the bow stance.

Grasping the Bird's Tail:

How Tai Chi Helped Me Through Chemotherapy

by Kathleen Tyau

Kathleen Tyau is the author of two novels about Hawaii, *A Little Too Much Is Enough* and *Makai*. She lives on a farm in Oregon.

Several months before starting chemotherapy, I stumble upon a Tai Chi class at the studio where I do Pilates twice a week. My side is aching, and I'm having trouble keeping up because the exercises are too strenuous for me right now. But Tai Chi I've studied years ago, although only the short form, which I have forgotten. Dave, the Tai Chi instructor, sees me peeking through the doorway and invites me in for a free introductory lesson. As I watch the more advanced students demonstrate part of the Yang style long form, I realize at once that this is what I've needed — what I've been craving for these past six years of living with uncertainty and now pain — gentle physical movement with a spiritual core in a relaxing, quiet place.

Strum the Lute

I want to learn the whole form right away, so I can practice at home when I can't make it to class during chemotherapy and also because I'm running out of time. Cancer can make you crazy when it comes to time. Staying in the present is harder when the future is a giant question mark. Outside I may seem calm, but inside I'm staccato. But Dave intuitively sets the right pace for our group, and soon I find peace in the repetition of the movements. Isn't this what we do every day? Repeat much of what we did the day before? The daily-ness of life is reassuring. So what if I don't know the entire long form yet. What matters is the doing. Even those who teach Tai Chi are still learning. The nuances of Tai Chi are such that I could be a student for the rest of my life. Suddenly I realize I'm trusting that I have a future, that I must not let cancer take that away from me.

Embrace the Tiger and Return to the Mountain

The first day of chemotherapy finally arrives. As the drugs drip into my veins and the painkillers start making me silly, I imagine thousands of warriors charging in to save me. But at home, when the medication wears off and the nausea and pain begin, it's just me facing the enemy, me limping along, too tired even to log on or talk on the phone. But when I finally return to Tai Chi class and Dave congratulates me for being there, I wonder, is this all it takes to get back my life? Show up, be with these kind people. Ward off the stress of pain, fatigue, and worry. Embrace the tiger and then let him go.

Repulse the Monkey

Each month of chemotherapy follows a similar pattern. Three weeks ranging from doped up to lousy to not that bad, then one week of feeling good enough to face the I.V. needles again. As the months progress, I worry about getting sick and not being able to complete the treatment. But I am determined to finish both chemo and Tai Chi, so I attend class when I can and my practice sessions at home grow longer and more spirited. The bad cells are dying, and I'm learning to deflect, parry, punch, and kick. Repulsing the monkey is something I can do, and what a pleasure that is. I'm fighting back, rising to step up, on my feet to the end. This isn't just exercise. This is a way to survive.

Wave Hands Like Clouds

When I first found out about the cancer, I comforted myself with the fact that we're all going to die one day, maybe even as soon as tomorrow. Car crash, bad meat, falling ladder — you name it. None of us is safe, and cancer survivors know

this by heart. That little black cloud hangs around a lot, no matter how optimistic you are. But when I go to Tai Chi class, I park gloom at the door. If I want to keep up with the others, I've got to watch and listen to Dave and imitate what he is doing. Focus on all parts of my body at once — torso, hands, legs, toes and elbows too. Must not think too far ahead or I'll forget where I am. Must not worry about forgetting which foot is my left and which way is North. Trust that what I'm doing now will get me where I need to go next. Trust that I won't always be where it's dark.

Fair Lady Works the Shuttles

After Tai Chi class, a few of us gather at B.J.'s coffee shop. Our conversation is casual but comprehensive, everything from pets to politics and more, and one day as we contemplate the virtues of a cup of chai tea, we dub ourselves the "Tai Chi Chicks." We even make T-shirts and wear them to class. It's more than a jest. Tai Chi connects us in an unspoken way and enhances the quality of our bond. I'd love nothing more than to have a normal, healthy life again, and the laughter and camaraderie I share with these women remind me that this is possible right now. Together we work the shuttles, weaving a support group I had not expected to find.

Strike the Tiger

I admit my current Tai Chi skills wouldn't last long in a down-and-dirty fight. If I were attacked, I probably would not aim my bow like an archer; I'd duck and then I'd run. When Dave demonstrates the martial arts applications of each movement, I'm nervous about getting hurt or accidentally injuring somebody. I'd like to be able to defend myself, but for now I'm content with the art. In fact, this is the quality of Tai Chi that attracts me most. The slow, graceful movements. The kicks and the spins. And the poetry! Striking the tiger's ears and spitting out the white snake's tongue — these inspire the fiction writer in me. I've done my share of pretending while writing novels and in facing cancer, but this kind of imagining is new to me. Acting like an animal forces me out of my head and into my body and releases what I've got tucked away in there a little of the worry and pain, but some of the courage too and this is what saves my hide right now.

White Crane Spreads Its Wings

Finally, I make it through chemo through the entire long form too my first time around for both, and there's no doubt as to which I'd rather repeat. Many things contribute to my recovery, but Tai Chi is the lens that brings them all into focus. Tai Chi teaches me patience, relieves my stress, and keeps me in the present. It allows me to imagine I am stronger than I am, and in so doing, I am. And it gives me friendship and a poetic connection with the universe.

In class we practice the entire long form together spreading our wings, making clouds, plunging to the bottom of the ocean, and rising to meet the stars but we don't need to go far to find our own warriors.



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By Kaxia E. Kowalewska

*When you look at the map of Europe you can see
a nice heart-shaped country in its middle.
That's Poland, our homeland.*

The interest in Chinese martial arts has been growing fast in Poland for the last decade or so. Although we do not have many teachers from China here on the spot, people keep going to various places all over the world to learn Tai Chi and become teachers. At the moment many schools and clubs teach almost all Tai Chi styles, but so far we have not heard of anyone teaching the traditional Yang Chengfu form. We want it to be commonly practiced here.

My husband Andi and I have been practicing Tai Chi since the early 1990's. We knew from the beginning it was going to be the traditional Yang style. Having attended several courses and practiced the long form in a couple of variations, we somehow felt these derivative versions never were our real goal in Tai Chi.

As we could not find what we wanted in Poland, we decided to look for it in China. At the Beijing Sport University Tai Chi course for foreigners we learned some simplified forms and the traditional Yang Chengfu form, called 85 or 88. On May vacation from the university we traveled to Yongnian county to see the birthplace of Yang Luchan. We visited Yang Luchan's house and talked to its custodian.

Being close to satisfied, on one sunny day in the Internet room of the BeiTiDa library we discovered Masters Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun and at once we knew there would be no need for us to seek any more. We were lucky to find their Tai Chi video at Xidan Bookstore and we started to adjust our form to the video. We practiced it on our journey back home through West China, Nepal and India.

In 2005 we became members of the Association and since then we attend Master Yang Jun's seminars once a year. Our progress is slow, for in Poland one must still strive a lot to keep on the surface. For now Tai Chi can only be a hobby, but our life is focused on our hobby. We dream of establishing a Yang Chengfu Centre in Warsaw, our city. We have been teaching the 103-movement form to a small group of friends: Ania, Marzena, Marysia, Jola and Aldona. They are all enthusiastic and they can feel the inner music of Tai Chi.

To all people who love Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan our warm greetings from Poland, the heart of Europe.





Managing chemotherapy side effects with Taijiquan and related complementary mind-body therapies : *an overview*

By Claude Fournier, MD

Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux de Beauce.
St-Georges, Quebec, Canada.

Frequent chemotherapy side effects

A diagnosis of cancer is already a source of distress in the life of an afflicted person and chemotherapy is a conventional form of treatment for many types of cancer. This treatment adds a heavy burden to the initial disease by its physical, psychological and social immediate and long term consequences.

Among the many non-specific immediate side effects of chemotherapy: nausea, fatigue and sleep disorders are frequently reported by patients.

Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV) are common and distressing problems in the treatment of cancerous patients. Though regimens have improved and are more finely targeted and despite the development of new antiemetic drugs, the pharmacologic approach remains limited to control CINV even following improved protocols.

Fatigue is the most frequent symptom cited in relation to cancer and its treatment; often lingering beyond the treatment phase. It was reportedly present at the time of diagnosis in approximately 50-75% of cancer patients and the prevalence increased to 80-96% in patients undergoing chemotherapy.

Also demonstrated as the most distressing phenomenon

experienced by cancer patients, fatigue and its manifestations are better appreciated if they are conceptualised as a syndrome, namely, cancer-related fatigue syndrome (CRFS). CRFS influences all aspects of quality of life and aggravates the experience of other distressing symptoms like nausea. Beside physical and psychosocial impact, there are also adverse economic consequences for the patients and their family. For all these reasons, CRFS is now an ever more considered aspect of the toxicity of chemotherapy. This being said, evaluation of CRFS is of a multidimensional complexity and its physiopathologic basis remains poorly understood to date.

Sleep disturbance is a prominent concern among cancer patients and occurs in approximately 30 to 50% of this population. It is evident that the cause of chronic sleep difficulties is multifaceted but up until recently, little attention has been given to the potential factors associated with the pathogenesis of cancer related insomnia. Among these factors, chemotherapy may bring distress to patients and adversely affect sleep quality.

Insomnia in the context of cancer is still under treated and it appears that the therapeutic approach has to be multimodal to augment its chances of success. Cautious usage of hypnotics is recommended as they are associated with a poorer quality of life.

A place for complementary and alternative medicines (CAM).

CAM are now widely integrated with classical cancer treatments. A subgroup of them is constituted by mind-body therapies which are defined by the National Institute of Health (NIH) as: “interventions that use a variety of techniques designed to facilitate the mind’s capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms”. This definition encompasses a vast array of disciplines that may include physical exercise, relaxation, meditation, Yoga, Qigong and Taijiquan among many others. The fundamental action principle of these practices would be the elicitation of the relaxation response.

Though many cancer patients utilize a wide variety of CAM, mind-body therapies are used by only less than 20% of them. The evidence is now strong to support the incorporation of MBT in the management of the treatment and disease-related symptoms of cancer. Those therapies should be more encouraged in an integrated approach to cancer treatment where research is well supported.

Taijiquan as a mind-body therapy in cancer treatment

In seven out of seventeen controlled trials with or without randomization, Taijiquan is recognised to improve quality of life and relieve stress. Though successful cancer supportive programs including Taijiquan have been described (Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Cancer Institute at Alexian Brothers Hospital Network), scientific evidence is lacking to support them. To date, there are only a few studies concerning the impact of Taijiquan on breast cancer survivors after their treatments but preliminary results are encouraging. Better self-esteem and functional capacity have been recorded among those women (See references).

Chemotherapy side-effects may be divided by their short and long term detrimental consequences. A team supported by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is now beginning two research projects concerning Taijiquan’s impact on the long term side-effects which include: fatigue, physical deterioration and metabolic abnormalities characteristic of the metabolic syndrome. A model is proposed to study Taijiquan compared to physical exercise that may highlight characteristic features of this mind-body intervention for cancer patients surviving for more than two years. (See references).

Until now, according to our knowledge, there has been no study assessing Taijiquan’s impact on chemotherapy’s immediate side effects. That’s why we will use disciplines related to Taijiquan for which there is good scientific evidence to construct a working hypothesis in that sense.

Mind-Body therapies and Chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting

Western cognitive and behavioural interventions are useful to mitigate CINV to a certain measure. Maintaining or developing a physical exercise program may constitute a

part of such interventions as many papers report the benefits of low to moderate intensity aerobic exercise on CINV. Preliminary results indicate that Yoga would also help to attenuate CINV.

Though recognised for its health benefits in general, Qigong is neglected as a complement in cancer treatment. According to a body of preliminary clinical observations Qigong would reduce chemotherapy side effects and it would be advantageous that its practice were more encouraged.

As a part of a cancer supportive care program, Qigong has been reported in self administered questionnaires to reduce stress in 78% of 334 patients and to increase well being in 74% of the same patients. Recently, a quasi-experimental design study reported that qigong significantly reduced pain, numbness, heartburn and dizziness associated with breast cancer and chemotherapy.

Mind-body therapies and fatigue

Aerobic exercise is one of the two tested interventions that showed consistent effects to alleviate cancer related fatigue syndrome (CRFS). Experience has demonstrated the feasibility of exercise programs during chemotherapy for breast cancer for more than a decade and more recently for other types of cancer.

Evidence suggests that low intensity aerobic exercise is sufficient to decrease fatigue levels over the course of cancer treatment though in some cases more demanding regimens may also be beneficial. Preliminary data suggest that group practice would add a sense of belonging and motivation, thus stimulating active lifestyles and supporting quality of life during treatment.

Recently, a scientific approach has been adopted toward meditation, specifically in regard to mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) method for healthy people in general and for cancer patients in particular. A rationale has been demonstrated for MBSR application in cancer population; fatigue diminution and an increase of vitality measured by the Profile of Mood State (POMS) questionnaire subscales being significant elements. Numerous other quality of life outcomes like anxiety, depressive mood and control perception also benefited from MBSR intervention.

Mind-body therapies and sleep disorders

An exploratory study revealed that mindfulness based stress reduction positively affected the sleep quality of a heterogeneous sample of cancer patients. Overall sleep disturbance was significantly reduced and largest improvements occurred in the areas of subjective sleep quality, sleep efficiency and duration as measured by the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI).

Yoga is a mind-body therapy for which preliminary evidence suggests positive psychological impact on cancer survivors, particularly for mood and stress. It is also reported to significantly improve sleep-related outcomes in

Managing chemotherapy side effects with Taijiquan and related complementary mind-body therapies : an overview

patients with lymphoma. These included better subjective sleep quality, faster sleep latency, longer sleep duration also measured with the PSQI. Less use of sleep medication has also been documented.


Outside the cancer treatment context, Taijiquan has been reported to improve self-rated quality of sleep in older adults.

Conclusion

As Taijiquan is now recognised as a low to moderate intensity aerobic exercise, it is normal to think that it would have at least the same benefits as those described earlier for aerobic exercise of the same intensity alone.

Both martial tradition and scientific researchers acknowledge meditative aspects to Taijiquan. A theoretic mindfulness model proposes that three axioms: intention, attention and attitude must be present for mindfulness (paying attention non-judgementally moment to moment, on purpose) to work. According to this conception, Taijiquan can be considered a kind of mindfulness meditation in motion, as the attention is deliberately and constantly maintained on each movement in a relaxed non judgmental manner. We should then expect with Taijiquan similar results as those obtained by other mindfulness based stress reduction techniques.

Finally, Taijiquan can be considered an exercise based in the martial arts which utilizes elements of Qigong practices in its training methods. Now incorporated in Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is recognised as a proper modality to facilitate qi (vital energy) circulation. Regarding chemotherapy side effects, we should expect with Taijiquan comparable benefits to those of Qigong.

In summary, Taijiquan is an art and a discipline per se but, as we just saw, it shares many characteristics of other disciplines that have demonstrated certain benefits in integrated cancer treatment. Taijiquan is a low to moderate aerobic exercise that shares similarities with Yoga, Qigong and meditation. For these reasons, we think that it might be helpful for patients with cancer undergoing chemotherapy. 

Particularly interesting references

Author's Note: All the references (80) used to write this article can be sent by the author on request (fouclao1@yahoo.com).

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<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct/show/NCT00246818?order=2>

Tai Chi or Aerobic Exercise in Improving Physical Fitness and Lowering Stress in Cancer Survivors

<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct/show/NCT00414791?order=6>

After

This Spring, the Winchester, Virginia Yang Chengfu Center hosted the largest ranking session to date in North America.

Twenty six participants and 11 examiners labored mightily to accomplish this testing process.

Pat Rice was the organizing director and after the tests were concluded she sent out the

following letter which should be of interest to all of us who are involved in the ranking process.

Matthew Bruni from Stockton, CA.

was one of the candidates and he has kindly written to share

his experiences as well.



The Ranking Test: *the Deluge*

Pat Rice

Director, Winchester Yang Chengfu Center of the
International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

I'd like to invite all of you to take an introspective look at your participation in the ranking event, whether you passed or did not pass. We don't use the "f" word ("fail") in this situation, we say "no pass" because no one who has put in the amount of work it takes to be prepared for an exam of this magnitude can be said to fail. I hope that all of you will gently examine your response to your results, whichever they were. Increased practice and deeper study are never wasted.

You've all had an important opportunity to re-evaluate your understanding of taijiquan and to live its principles in a particular situation: testing, that I wouldn't call "real" but which could tell you something about yourself and how you might act and respond in some actual situation. Apply your newfound insights to other parts of your life.

To those who achieved their desired rank, we extend congratulations. You have a lot of work ahead of you now.

To those who did not achieve your desired rank, we sympathize. You have a lot of work ahead of you now. Whether it's any consolation to you, I can tell you that at least one person in each of the levels One through Four did not pass during the weekend. Some of those testing this weekend were re-testing, having previously not passed.

Here's a small silver lining: when you re-test for the same level, you don't have to re-take the written test for that level if you passed it the first time, regardless of what you did in the performance section. And by the way, Master Yang Jun has been heard to say that "you forget thirty percent of what you know when you go out to do that performance test."

But this letter is to everyone who tested this past Saturday, regardless of your test results. You've received some valuable feedback on your progress, or at least on your ability to demonstrate publicly your level of progress. It is always a challenge to perform to your usual level, and even more so to come to your desired level, when you're in a situation that is intrinsically stressful: unfamiliar judges looking at you and pronouncing a judgment (sometimes it's even worse when they are known to you), the stringent requirements and firm scoring methods established by the

Association, and the seeming finality of the pass-no-pass verdict. Although we can tell ourselves it's an assessment of our ability to internalize the taijiquan principles (especially that one about "tranquility") it can grow so much larger in our minds that we begin to believe it's a judgment on our personal worth. We remind ourselves that this isn't true, whether we're thinking in terms of the result called "pass" or that other one, the "no-pass."

Now all of you have a good opportunity to ask yourselves some important questions, small and large. You can add to the list for yourself.

"What did I do well?" Give yourself as much credit as possible.

"What did I do poorly?" Be honest but not harsh.

"What do I wish I'd done differently during the test?"

"What do I wish I'd done differently during the preparation?"

"What did I learn or gain?" Don't answer this one too quickly, there's a lot to mine from it.

"Where do I go from here?"

"How do I get there?"

"When do I start?"

"Who will help me?"

"What do I want from ranking?"

"What do I want from taijiquan?" This one we should ask ourselves daily when we enter our practice time and our internal training.

I hope your experience will be an inspiration to you to go deeper into your studies. Assess yourself and your intentions. Re-apply yourself to learning and understanding. Revel in the experiential aspects. Ask for guidance from your teachers and coaches. Read the wisdom of other teachers through books. Share with your taiji brothers and sisters: we're family.

Enjoy.

Play.





I Will “Not Pass” This Way Again

Reflections on Ranking

by Matthew Bruni

It wasn't what I wanted to happen and I know it's something that many students fear. I skipped a move in the sword form during my ranking exam and finished with my back to the judges. It was clear that I wouldn't achieve the rank of level four that day. But it may have been the best move I didn't make. That might seem surprising, but I'm beginning to realize that it's all about the experiences and challenges we have that bring us the important lessons we need to learn.

First, there was all that went into preparation. Like most students, I stepped up the intensity of my daily practice. I spent my lunch breaks going over long Chinese names, places and philosophies. In the evenings, I often took a lesson from Master Yang Jun on DVD, noting corrections needed in my forms. I tried to dispel the “in front of the crowd” jitters by taking my tai chi to the streets and doing my forms in public plazas and parks. As the date for the ranking came closer, I felt fairly well prepared.

At last, the weekend of ranking arrived. Every time that I have traveled for tai chi, I always reacquaint myself with old friends, meet a new set of friends and learn many things. What an experience it was to practice the previous day surrounded by students testing for ranks as high as level 5 and to meet the directors who would be our judges. It is such an amazing feeling to observe tai chi at this level.

There is a big difference between writing out the ten principles of tai chi during the written exam and applying them. The external elements are more easily understood (head up, shoulders and elbows down, relax the waist, etc.). But what about “balance the inner thoughts with the outer techniques” and “tranquility in movement”? Even though I studied these principles prior to the examination, I was not fully successful in achieving them. I am proud that I was able to keep my spirit high in spite of my mistake. But clearly there is much more for me to learn about calming my mind and controlling my chi.

It would have been gratifying to have passed my ranking. But there is so much to be learned in failure. I often smile

when I hear phrases like “you have to go left to go right” or “you must move down in order to move up”. It's all part of the circles that we are learning – always yin and yang together. So, maybe you have to experience failure before you can really know success.

All of this has inspired me to look deeper at the meaning of the principles we study. In my reading I learned that we have three treasures of the human body – our essence (Jing), our vital energy (Chi) and our spirit (Shen). We need to strengthen, support and increase each of these until at some point we can empty our minds and be able to move our bodies without all of the distractions that come from so many different places. Could I react and neutralize the sudden threat of an opponent without my chi coming up, without losing my calm? Maybe the ultimate opponent is myself. I now recognize that many challenging life experiences, such as ranking exams, can be a test in the application of these three treasures.

Originally I had reservations about ranking. I wasn't sure that it fit with some of the ideas we practice. But I decided to rank simply because Master Yang Jun feels that it is important. As usual, I might not understand why, but I have to trust that following his guidance will offer me the experiences I need.

I feel fortunate to be part of an organization that provides me with opportunities to learn these lifelong lessons without dwelling negatively on the outcomes. It took me two tries to pass my level 3 ranking and I don't know yet how many performances I will need to achieve level 4. Whether I pass or don't pass on ranking day, I will learn a lesson and “not pass” this way again.

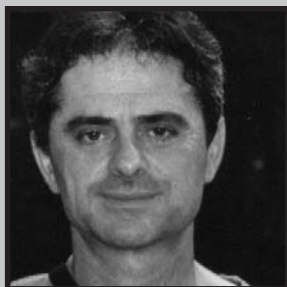
As they say, practice makes perfect. At our last seminar, Master Yang Jun mentioned that there is a similar phrase in Mandarin, but the Chinese word is not “perfect” – it's better than perfect. Everyone listened carefully to find out what could be better than perfect. Like so many things in tai chi, concepts overwrite what you think you already know. The word is more like being born – you create something new! ☯

The 1st European Yang Family Taijiquan Workshop

November 7-11, 2007



Frank Grothstuck



Claudio Mingarini



Therese Teo MeiMei



Giuseppe Turturo

All courses are taught following strictly the principles and traditional Yang Family forms of barehands, weapons and push hands, from the lineage of Yang Luchan to present day descendants Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun.

TAI CHI I

Teacher : Therese Teo MeiMei

Workshop I

The 49 yang form will be taught as a basis to introduce our traditional school of body, hand postures and footwork. For those who know other Yang forms and would like a clearer understanding to benefit their own training.
REQUIREMENTS:
At least 1 year of taijiquan training.

TAI CHI II

Teacher : Frank Grothstuck

Workshop I

Details of movements, corrections of forms and principles will be taught, focusing on rooting, relaxing and extending body to develop the internal feeling and make the taijiquan alive.
REQUIREMENTS:
3 years taijiquan experience and knowledge of 103 Yang form

SWORD I

Teacher : Frank Grothstuck

Workshop II

The basic sword techniques and the 1st set of movements(15-20 forms) will be taught.
REQUIREMENTS:
Participants should know the traditional Yang long form or already practising another taijiquan school sword form.

SWORD II

Teacher : Therese Teo MeiMei

Workshop II

An indepth detailed sword and handgrip technique, with form corrections of the Yang 67 sword form will be taught.
REQUIREMENTS:
Participants have to know the complete 67 Sword form.

SABER

Teacher : Giuseppe Turturo

Workshop I
The Yang family 13 postures saber form will be taught for beginners who have studied taijiquan. Also benefits those who know the form and want to review and understand the basics better.

PUSH HANDS

Teacher : Claudio Mingarini

Workshop II
This course will start with the theoretical introduction about the fundamental principles, practising basic to more advanced circles to develop the ability to stick, adhere, connect and follow, as well as the study of applications (yongfa)

REQUIREMENTS:
Practise at least one year of taijiquan.
Benefits all levels.

Open class push hands:
Claudio, assisted by Giuseppe 3 evenings
A great opportunity to push hands with different partners and receive corrections and learn more.
For all levels

For more
information
contact :

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Manchester, NH., USA

March 8-9: 49 Form

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*April 19-21: 103 Form
April 23: Saber Form*

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East Brunswick, New Jersey, USA

Feb 16, 17: 49 Form

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Tel: (732) 238-1414

Mexico City, Mercia

March 14-15: Hand Form

Contact: Daniel Corona A
www.taichi.org.mx

Rome and Milan, Italy

*April 25-27: Hand Form
April 29: Saber Form
April 30: Beginners*

Contact: Claudio Mingarini
Giuseppe Turturo
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Tel: 39-229527422
39-347-3635333

Winchester, VA., USA

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