



The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

# Tai Chi Chuan

Number 22 | Winter 2007



國際楊氏太極拳協會



# President's Message

Translated by Mui Gek Chan

Once again, the end of the year approaches! As the year comes to a conclusion, there is the anticipation of the beginning of a new one. As I look back, the year 2007 brings many unforgettable memories...

First, there was the grand ceremony in China in July of this year. On July 14<sup>th</sup> in Taiyuan, we celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Shanxi Association and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Invitational Tournament. This time, we had fourteen different countries and one hundred and sixty participants from our International Association. The oldest participant was eighty-four years old and the youngest was five. The largest contingent was from Brazil's Sao Paulo Yang Chengfu Center, with twenty-two people. The most significant event was the International Association's group presentation consisting of 120 players from fourteen countries performing the 49 form. Having learnt from the past experience of 2002, this time the group formation and coordinated performance far surpassed our previous efforts. The blue traditional uniforms everyone wore further presented a united spirit of taijiquan overseas. Coupled with the musical accompaniment, our performance at the opening ceremony captured the audience's attention. As a result, the spectators broke into a thunderous applause. Our group performance became the main topic of discussion. It also made the headlines of the local newspaper and television news. In the tournament, Suzanne Trojanowski of Michigan won gold medals in hand form, sword, and saber for the young adult division. Taijiquan enthusiasts in China were impressed with the standard of overseas taijiquan practitioners and look upon them with utmost respect. The grand ceremony ended on a successful note emphasizing that all taiji practitioners are one family.

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Rinaldo Baldini from Brazil and the delegation from Fenyang, Shanxi.  
Photo by Pam Boyde

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The International Association's participation added to the success of China's 2007 celebration. I represent my grandfather in extending a sincere thank you to our members and their families for their support, and especially all the center directors whose support made this a successful international affair. While in China, we took the opportunity to sample the local foods and did some sightseeing. In particular, two dinner banquets left a deep impression. The first was our last dinner in Taiyuan at the vast Shengtai Garden where flowers and plants from all over were grown. At that banquet were people who despite a difference in language were friends because of a common link to taiji. The next was at the Jixin Banquet Dance in Kunming. Not only did we sample Yunnan's local delicacies, we also had an unforgettable experience of admiring the magnificent costumes of Yunnan's many minority peoples and watching their beautiful song and dance performances. At Lijiang's old city, everyone was fascinated by the city's beauty and the business atmosphere. People marveled at how the tiny city was able to accommodate more than two thousand small shops.

In early October, Malaysia's Yang Chengfu Tai Chi Chuan Association held the "World Tai Chi Chuan and Health Seminar" in Kuala Lumpur. All the five taiji styles' representatives were there and their presence added

grandeur to the atmosphere. This year was the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the independence of Malaysia and the Association made arrangements for a thousand people to participate in the taiji performance at the commemoration. Much to the delight and satisfaction of taijiquan enthusiasts, the different taiji styles' representatives also performed and demonstrated their skills. This year in the beginning of September, my grandfather and I went to Seoul and Pusan, South Korea and taught for two weeks. As this was the first time we ever taught in South Korea, it was also the first encounter taijiquan enthusiasts there had with Traditional Yang Style Taijiquan. So, we are invited to return shortly and teach taijiquan again.

Since it is near the end of the year, I would like to extend some early wishes: wishing you warm holidays, good health in the coming year, success in all your endeavors, harmony in your families, and may all your wishes come true!

Yang Jun,  
President



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# China Adventure 2007

*The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the*

*Shanxi Association*

*and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Invitational*

*Tournament of Traditional*

*Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan* | PART 1

By Dave Barrett

**M**y seventh journey to the Orient got off to an auspicious start. Prior to boarding our 10 hour flight to Beijing in Vancouver BC, my companion Chris Stanley and I were summoned to the agents counter at the gate. We were informed that our flight was overbooked in coach and asked if we would be willing to surrender our seats and accept two seats in First Class. Thinking swiftly, we said yes and were whisked aboard and found ourselves staring at the bubbles rising from our flutes of champagne. Toasting the good natured chagrin of the rest of our group as they filed past, we settled in for the long flight.

I'll spare you, gentle reader, the details of the crisp linens, polished silver and crystal service; the exquisite food and fine wines to sound only one sour note. There was so much leg room that I actually had to get out of my seat to put my book away in the seat pocket in front of me prior to reclining full length for a well deserved nap. First class travel can be exhausting.

Flying into Beijing is always uniquely exciting. One feels the same strange magnetism that the hive must exert on the returning honeybee. Drawn into a vast, moiling mass of humanity we found ourselves swept into and carried along by this amazing tide. As always, the relief at seeing the welcoming smiles of our guides, Sunny and Wei, knowing that from here on out we were in their capable hands. We spent the night at an airport hotel, and greeted each new wave of arrivals from France, Italy, Brazil, and other exotic homelands, even Madagascar! Back at the

The Thrill of Victory: Dave Barrett and Robert Gott



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Grand entry

airport the following morning our line of luggage stretched some 50 meters from the counter. Our flight to Taiyuan was short and sweet, a far cry from the 8 hour bus ride we had endured 5 years ago. Indeed, the improvements to China's tourist infrastructure are profound, and the pace of these is quickening with the approach of the 2008 Summer Olympics. New hotels, new airports, new toilets, everything seemingly installed yesterday with the paint yet to dry.

As we gathered in Taiyuan our group of international friends grew to 170. Of these, 120 of us began preparing for the opening ceremonies of the tournament the next day where we would perform the 49 form in front of a vast hometown audience of Taiji enthusiasts. Walking at dawn through the empty streets to a nearby elementary school courtyard, we assembled in a light rain to begin organizing our formation for performance. Past experience has shown that getting a group this large onto the floor in some semblance of order is like trying to herd cats. Our head cat herder, Bill Walsh, worked patiently with us organizing our entrance and exit positions. I found myself in formation behind a young man from Madagascar, in front of my truck driving friend Rich from New Jersey with a Brazilian to my left and a French woman to my right. As we did our first run through, I just had to smile in amazement. From halfway across the world, we were all one family of Taiji students. Ilo Randranto's Malagasy Roll Back was identical to the Brazilian's. A synchronicity of sensation gradually bonded us together into a performing corps and I think I also detected a look of bemused amazement on Master Yang Jun's face as he watched our rehearsal. That afternoon we had an additional run through which was not as stellar as many of us were cranky and jet lagged by then.

The next morning we gathered in the hotel lobby wearing our blue traditional uniforms. It was at this point that the excitement became palpable. Milling about outside the sports arena prior to the grand entrance, our spirits continued to rise. By the time we marched into the packed arena we were as giddy as kindergarteners at a school pageant. Applause swept around the thousands of spectators as we marched waving and smiling at the multitudes, feeling like Olympians on the top of Mt. Olympus. Then we were off the



On the floor

floor, nervously trying to find our places in formation, being patiently herded by Bill Walsh in the cramped entryway. Peeking nervously at the exquisite performance of some of the Shanxi Association's top players that preceded our show, I'm sure many of us had the same thought, "Damn, they are good! We have to follow that?"

Our moment came; our rows flowed across the floor, filling the entire arena floor. We turned as one, waited for the music and began one of the most memorable performances of my life. Again the sensation of synchronicity knit us together. We finished Grasping the Bird's Tail in unison, the crowd burst into applause which then accompanied each end position. From my vantage point in the middle of the formation, it was like being carried along by a wave of fluid and relaxed energy. Buoyant and suspended by our collective effort, we each contributed to and partook of this marvelous experience. Later, of course, this fell apart slightly; especially during the Lotus Sweeping kick when 240 hands hit 120 feet each at a different time but by then we had accomplished what we had set out to do. To show that all of the hard work teaching and even harder traveling that Masters Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun have done over the past decade has brought forth a standard of excellence and achievement that is worldwide. Later that morning my path crossed that of Master Yang Zhenduo's; he grabbed my elbow and shook my hand and said in English, "Very, very good!!" He was as proud and pleased as any parent could be.

Offstage after the demonstration we were pleased as well, mightily relieved to be sure, and still glowing with that special feeling of unified accomplishment. We settled into the stands to watch the rest of the demonstrations that morning. Master Chen Zhenglei and his son Harry showed the awesome fluid power of Chen style. The quiet dignity of Master Wu Wenhan and the happy tranquility Master Ma Hailong's performances were deeply impressive. Master Yang Jun took to the floor as a returning hometown hero to thunderous applause and gave a most unique demonstration. His motions were precise and powerful, as usual but they were completely new. His forms transitioned in ways we had never seen, motions blending together in bold new



Chen Zhenglei and son

ways none of us could have imagined. He offered us an improvisation on traditional sequences and his energy was amazingly fresh. I asked him later, "What was that form you were doing?" "I don't know," he replied, "I made it up on the spot."

The grand opening ceremonies concluded with a performance of Northern Style Long Fist by a delegation from Fenyang, Shanxi Province. I would guess that the average age of the 30 performers was 8 or 9 and the sheer ferocity of their skills had everyone captivated. It was a morning that presented the entire spectrum of Chinese Martial traditions.

That same afternoon the competition got underway and those participating were thrown into an entirely different atmosphere. Imagine a large gymnasium with a packed gallery. There are 3 competition squares on the floor, each with 4 judges at the corners and a head judge's table with 4 officials. When you walk into the square it is split in half, you get your half and another competitor gets the other. There are 8 people watching intently from every angle. You bow to the head judge, compose yourself as best you can, the whistle blows and you each begin. Trying not to be distracted by what the other competitor is doing, hoping the judges can't see the slight tremor in your legs that you cannot stop, remembering that seeking tranquility in motion can really be a challenge under such circumstances; you try first and foremost to just survive. Thrust into a white hot glare where each breath is now an act of conscious will power, all the preparations, repetitions and training are burnt away leaving the essence of your practice to be judged. I can only tell you, gentle reader, about my feelings. How you react may be entirely different but above all else I hope to encourage you to partake of this unique experience.

For me, memories of my 1<sup>st</sup> competition performance five years ago are those of complete panic. Coming from a background of theatrical training I thought I was prepared to handle the anxiety, the extra adrenaline and chatter throughout my nervous system. Five years ago I stepped onto the floor, calm cool and collected, only to be ambushed by a tidal wave of paralyzing stiff energy. When I was five years old I slipped while climbing onto the kitchen counter. My hand went down into the electric toaster which switched



Gold medalists  
Suzanne  
Trojanowski,  
Duc Nguyen Minh,  
Robert Gott,  
Sergio Arione and  
Dave Barrett with  
the Masters Yang

on and I was stuck there screaming - being toasted and shocked at the same time until my mother ran in to pull my hand out. That was what I felt like 5 years ago, only no one ran in to pull me out.

This time around was different, although the adrenaline and the nervous chatter were old friends come to the party again. What has changed is my understanding of the intent and purpose of the motions. Master Yang Jun has made it his mission to share the applications, the martial foundations of the techniques, showing the power and grace of energy focused by mind in the service of specific purpose.

As I began my routine I focused my mind on each sensation generated by the motions. I could feel my palm grabbing the opponent. The uprooting ward off energy flowed freely from my feet through the legs, issuing from my back all the way to my fingertips. Then I could feel the energy reverse and flow in for the Roll Back; reverse again flowing outward for Press, back in again for the transition to Push and then back out to complete Pushing. Rather than being nervous, I was entranced by this heightened sensitivity and proceeded from one sequence to the next seeing the opponent clearly, neutralizing his attacks and attacking in turn. The competition square, the judges, the crowd faded away. I found myself in a realm of focused energy, expanding and contracting, freely flowing through my body at the instantaneous direction of my thoughts. Some call it the zone. Another writer more skilled than I has described this rapture:

*Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,  
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,  
e sempre di mirar faceasi accessa.*

*So was my mind—completely rapt, intent,  
steadfast, and motionless—gazing; and it  
grew ever more enkindled as it watched.*

(Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 97-100. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum, University of California Press, 1984)

As I glided into the closing form and stood quietly for the briefest moment before saluting and leaving the floor I marveled at the tranquility I felt. What a gift! To find such peace in the midst of the pressure of competition.





The International group performs under the banner: " All the world over Taiji players are one family"

After my score went up there was a good deal of excitement among our Chinese hosts and many came to shake my hand. Only later did I discover that I had won a gold medal for this performance. I had no idea, had never thought that I would even place on the winners stand. I had taken to heart the Taiji strategy of investing in loss and had come out a winner. You could have knocked me over with a feather!

It turns out our international group did quite well on the winners stand, led by Suzanne Trojanowski who gathered 3 gold medals. At the closing ceremony gold medalists from each age division teamed up and performed hand, sword and saber forms. My hand form group of men and women, ages ranging from the early twenties to the late seventies, had never rehearsed. Actually we foreigners had no idea we would be performing until the ceremony began. What a thrill it was to be among such marvelous players from so many different cultures. Freed from the pressures of competing I count our performance that day as one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

I must tell you one more story. Early the next morning several of us walked to the Children's Park to practice. There we fell in with a large group led by some of Master Yang Zhen duo's most accomplished students. Almost 100 of us began as the sun rose over the park. It was during this session that I glimpsed the soul of Taijiquan and the promise it holds for the future of humanity. As we moved slowly and quietly an aura of tranquility began to emanate and pervade the surroundings. People passing by paused, one young woman came and sat. She was obviously distraught but as she watched you could see her calm down, her features softened and she relaxed. We have no idea of the intense pressures at work in modern China. The country is being torn down almost faster than it is being rebuilt. The miasma of choking pollution, the noise and the crowds are overwhelming. That morning and every morning, the practice of Taijiquan can bring joy, peace and the grace of equilibrium into our lives. This tranquility is real; you can feel it and you can find it every time you practice. ☯

**Next issue, Part 2:** The China Adventure 2007 continues in the highlands of Yunnan!

# Lost

Arriving in Taiyuan three weeks prior to Shanxi China's third Traditional Yang-style International Invitational Competition, I developed an appreciation for the logistics involved in holding an event for 700 participants, including 150 from 13 different countries. My contribution was to translate the speeches for the opening and closing ceremonies and to work with a very special group of volunteer translators. Their tasks included helping us line up to enter the gym for the competition events and escorting us on the busses to and from the hotel, the restaurants and the gym.

Being a novice at translating, I quickly discovered that the work requires an understanding of the culture of both the original and target languages. For example, "yundong yuan" is generally translated as "athletes". However, because in the West, most taiji practitioners do not participate in competitions, the term "player" may be more appropriate. After some discussion, we decided that in the context of the competition, we could indeed be considered "athletes."

The volunteer translators ranged in age from 10 year old "Tina," a precocious young lady, who described herself as "outgoing and friendly" in an essay that won an award in her language school, to recent college graduates. While most of them had a parent or relative who practices taiji, only Wendy, a 14 year old middle school student, who impressed me with her fluency in English, practices taiji. Currently studying the Second Chen Routine (laojia er lu), she noted that unlike American teenagers, young people in China do not have many opportunities to volunteer.

By the end of the three days of competition, several of the volunteers expressed a deep respect for the foreigners, who worked hard to learn taiji. Zhangyi took time from his compulsory military service to write that he will always remember the 120 foreign players performing the 49 form



# *in* Translation

By Glenda Liu Quarnstrom

together for the Opening Ceremony, as well as the five who won gold medals. The volunteers shared our disappointments as well. Dong Jiaxin told me that when one of the women from Brazil was so nervous she could not complete the form, Dong cried along with her, blaming herself for not doing more to help.

Shen Hao, a recent graduate from college with a degree in engineering, is a thoughtful writer, who told the story of five individuals he met, choosing a word to describe each one. James Fox, who engaged him in a philosophical conversation about life, was described as embodying “belief.” Pamela Flanagan from New York, who entered three events even though she has only studied taiji for three years, impressed him for her “courage.” A surgeon who discussed visual recognition therapy was called “wisdom.” Vickie Norman threw him to the ground demonstrating an application, with the admonition, “you should study taiji.” Impressed, he wrote that she embodies, “boldness and humor.” For me, he chose the word “dedication,” but my closest friends and family members say that “obsession” is perhaps more appropriate.

Li Xing, who hopes to attend medical school, was surprised at how easily he could talk to Americans older than himself. In China, due to the influence of Confucian traditions, the younger generation shows respect for their elders, while superiors act with decorum. This makes it difficult to have friends of his parent’s generation. As an example, he wrote, when he told me he had heard my translations of the opening ceremony speeches, my reaction was that of a “cute girl, who just got a prize from her teacher,” and he could not imagine HIS professors acting that way.

I met with the group in the park at night to hone their oral skills. As word spread that Taiyuan would host 150 foreigners, my little English corner grew

larger each evening. Those who were ultimately chosen were concerned that they do a good job and I had to reassure them that they were equal to the task. How difficult could it be to escort foreigners back and forth from the hotel and into the gym?

Of course the Westerners refused to be herded about like sheep and wandered off or boarded the wrong bus. As the volunteers later pointed out, not everyone spoke English and the names were difficult to pronounce. Thus it was sometimes a challenge locating people who were scheduled to compete. As I was waiting to be called for my turn, several of the volunteers came up in a panic, asking if I had seen “Lisa.” “Lisa who”, I asked, but when I glanced at the list, it read just that – “Lisa.” Perhaps I should not have been surprised, because as far as my teacher, Yao Junfang is concerned there is only one “David” (Barrett), one “Bill” (Walsh) and one “Frank” (Grothstuck) in the entire world.

Nothing however, could have prepared Wang Xing for the bus ride back to the hotel, after the first day of competition. It was raining and the large bus hit a man on a bicycle. The police came and took the driver, followed by an ambulance that whisked away the injured man, leaving Wang Xing alone on the bus with a delegation from France and two Americans. Traffic was too heavy for the other bus to turn around and pick us up. After trying unsuccessfully to hail a cab, she called Sunny, the professional guide, who is a veteran at shepherding Yang taiji players around China. Sunny, still at the restaurant, sprinted back to the hotel, commandeered a small van from another company, and pleading, “Please help! Foreigners are stranded in Taiyuan”, came to our rescue. When we were all safely on our way back to the hotel, Sunny apologized in tears. The French delegation immediately broke into the song, “Don’t Worry Be Happy.”

From this experience, I developed a profound respect for Sunny, who not only speaks English flawlessly, but is a bridge between China and the West. Her ability to bond with the Yang group is perhaps due in part to her own interest in martial arts, which she has studied since she was five. Currently, she studies with Fan Dezhi, a disciple of Master Yang and leader of the team that took a gold medal in the sword.

For my part, I feel fortunate to have made friends with a special group of enthusiastic young Chinese. I thank them for all they did to help with the competition, encourage them to continue their study of English and look forward to rejoining our English corner the next time I am in Taiyuan.



*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 6

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

### PART VI

**Looking at: “Chen zhui jian zui zhou”, “Sink the shoulder and droop the elbows”**

To understand this principle, we have to begin with the basic anatomy of the arm structure at the shoulder.

There is one joint that connects all the bones of the arm structure to the rest of our body: the sternoclavicular joint (Figure 1, circle a).

This joint is located on the top of the sternum (breastbone). From this joint, the clavicle extends outward and meets the acromium (the raised ridge of the scapula (shoulder blade)). The meeting of these two bones form the second joint of the shoulder area, the acromioclavicular joint (Figure 1, circle b). The third joint we encounter is the glenohumeral joint (shoulder joint) which is formed by the rounded head of the humerus (long bone of the upper arm) resting against a depression on the outer edge of the scapula, the glenoid fossa (Figure 1, circle c).

Looking at the bones in the shoulder area, we can discern the job that each one does:

The clavicle holds the arm structure away from the body, the scapula provides muscle attachments that provide strength to the arm and connection to the rest of the body, the glenohumeral joint (shoulder joint) allows 360 degrees of freedom in the movement of the arm.

The clavicle, in holding the arm away from the body in the rib area, fulfills two important functions. One is protective. The clavicle gives our bodies a “crumple zone”, to borrow a term from automobile designers. When we fall, the shoulder area is frequently the area of impact. The clavicle transfers the force of the fall across the top of the rib cage, absorbing energy and thus helping to prevent damage to the bones of the ribs and injury to the vital organs. If the fall is hard, the clavicle will sometimes break to dissipate the force that would otherwise damage the rib cage.

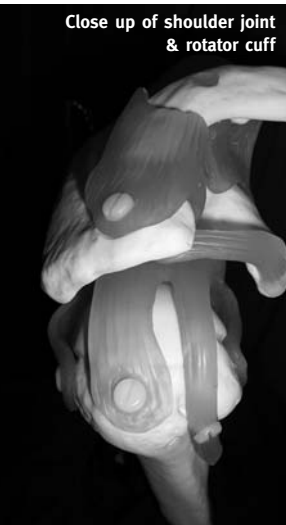
The other essential function of the clavicle is providing clearance for the glenohumeral joint. Without the clavicle, the shoulder joint would not be able to clear the rib cage and rotate with 360 degrees of freedom.

The scapula provides many surfaces for muscle attachments. Through these attachments, the arm structure is linked to the head, the rib cage, the vertebral column, and the pelvis. It is the position of the scapula, relative to the head and the rib cage, which creates the posture of the shoulder joint. The movement of the scapula raises, lowers, tilts, pulls back, or pulls forward the location of the shoulder joint relative to the rest of our body. The muscles that attach to the scapula are some of the most massive in our body. We can hang our entire body from one arm or do a handstand because of the power that is provided by the scapular muscles.

The glenohumeral joint, by contrast, is not built for power but



figure 1



Close up of shoulder joint & rotator cuff

for precision and range of movement. The muscles of the “rotator cuff” that guide movement at the shoulder joint are positioned in a way that is similar to the muscles that attach to the sphere of our eyeballs and allow our eyes to gaze in a 360 degree range. The design of the rotator cuff gives the glenohumeral joint (close up, pg.10) enormous flexibility. However, the rotator cuff is vulnerable to injury particularly when the rounded head of the humerus is pushed upward, in other words, when the shoulder joint is not sunk. This type of injury can happen when we fall onto our hand when our arm is stretched out with the elbow locked or when our arm is forced backward when it is raised up or when the shoulder joint is forced forward when the arm is held back (as in “rollback”).

Now that we have a basic knowledge of the anatomy of the arm structure, we can understand how to “sink our shoulders”. We know that to “sink the shoulder” we have to move the scapula in some way because it is the scapula that determines the posture of the shoulder joint.

In order to “sink the shoulder”, it is important to know what raises up the shoulder joint and prevents us from sinking it. The posture of your head affects the posture of your shoulder joint because of the many muscle attachments that connect the arm structure to the head. When your head is held forward of your body, (notice the position of your head relative to your body as you are reading this journal article!), your scapula will be pulled up and forward toward the top of your ribs. This raises up and tilts your shoulder joint forward, making it impossible to “sink” it (Figure 2a).

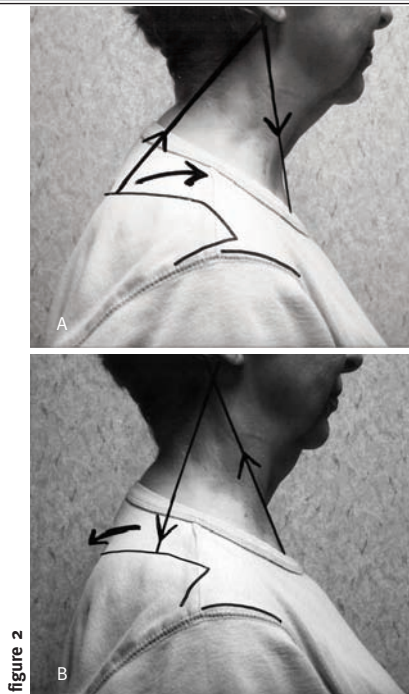


figure 2

A more upright head posture (Figure 2b) will allow the scapula and shoulder joint to maintain a lower posture.

Next, we have to consider the muscles that can pull the scapula downward and thus lower the posture of the shoulder joint. Figure 3a diagrams the action of the pectoralis minor muscle with black arrows. This muscle pulls

the scapula downward, forward, and in towards the ribs. We can feel the action of this muscle if we place the palm of our hand on our breastbone and let the fingers rest against our chest, reaching diagonally upward with the middle finger touching the caracoid process of the scapula – the bony “hook” we can see below “b” and beside “c” in Figure 1. With our hand in this position, Figure 3b, we can feel the action of this muscle if we tighten it to pull the shoulder joint down and forward relative to the front of our rib cage.

Looking at Figure 4a, we see arrows that represent the line of action of the serratus anterior muscle. This muscle attaches to the inner surface of the scapula (the side that lies against the back of the rib cage) and reaches forward to connect to the first eight or nine ribs toward the front of the rib cage. This muscle is

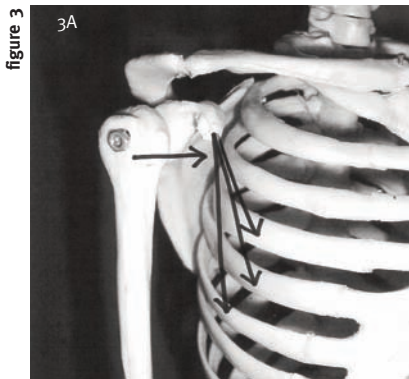


figure 3

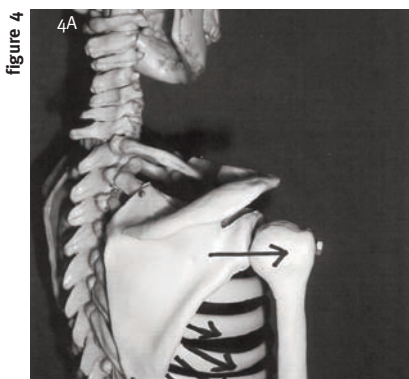


figure 4





5A

5B

figure 6



figure 5

easy to see on athletes who have developed great upper body strength, like boxers or gymnasts. If you look at the sides of their rib cage, serratus anterior looks like fingers reaching around and down toward the abdominal “six pack” muscles. When we activate this muscle, we can feel the lower edge of our scapula sliding diagonally down and forward, Figure 4b.

The serratus anterior pulls the scapula from the back of our bodies toward the front, rotating the scapula slightly as its lower edge is pulled forward and down along the curve of the rib cage. As the scapula rotates, the shoulder joint is moved slightly outward, abducting the arm away from the body, which preserves the mobility and freedom of the glenohumeral joint.

Since discussion of the principle states that “sinking the shoulders” means the shoulders “relax open and hang downward”, the action of the serratus anterior muscle combined with upright head posture would seem to fulfill the requirement. Of course, in any action, many muscles contribute, so we are referring to the primary mover or line of action where we would focus our intention as we strive to fulfill the principle.

The action of the pectoralis minor muscle also lowers the shoulder joint but it closes the arm toward the ribs rather than opening the arm. If we compare Figure 5a and Figure 5b, we see

“sink the shoulder” using two different intentions. In Figure 5a, the intention is through the pectoralis minor muscle and in Figure 5b, the intention is lead through the serratus anterior muscle. In both photos, the shoulder joint is lowered. In 5a, the joint is also pulled in toward the body, or closed. In 5b, the joint is slightly abducted, or open. It would seem that Figure 5b illustrates an intention that is following the principle more accurately because it includes a concept of opening.

The position of the elbows is also mentioned the principle, chen zhui jian zui zhou. The elbows should be “dropped” or “drooped”. Again, we look to the study of anatomy to discover how elbows can be drooped while the arm is lifted up.

The orientation of the elbow joint, whether the elbow is pointed downward or outward or upward or inward, is determined by the rotation of the humerus, the long bone of the upper arm. Rotation of the arm bone calls into play the mighty latissimus dorsi muscle, diagramed in Figure 6. This muscle is the primary link between the arm structure and the waist area. Without the action of the latissimus dorsi, there would be no way to transfer energy from the waist to the hands. “Drooping” the elbows requires rotation of the humerus, this action engages the latissimus dorsi, and connects the arm structure to the waist. The

action of this muscle also draws the arm structure downward and backward, balancing the action of the serratus anterior which pulls the shoulder joint downward and forward. This forward and backward “dance” between the latissimus dorsi and the serratus anterior muscles give the feeling that the shoulder joint is being moved from below rather than from above, in other words, the movement of the joint is “sunk”.

In summary, to fulfill this principle we have to keep in mind a few points:

- 1 The position of our head will affect our ability to sink our shoulders.
- 2 Our shoulder joint is lowered by moving our scapula.
- 3 It is important to keep our shoulder joint open when we sink it to retain flexibility in our shoulder joint.
- 4 Sinking the shoulder joint protects us from injury.
- 5 By rotating our elbows downward, we connect our arms to our waist area.\*

\*(Even when our arm is raised over our head, as in “White Crane Separates Its Wings”, we can still “drop” the elbow by rotating our upper arm, and then we will feel the connection of our arm to our waist area. In this posture, it is also easy to feel the action of the serratus anterior muscle, pulling the lower edge of our scapula down and forward along the ribs to sink the shoulder joint. If we place our left hand under our right shoulder joint as we maintain the right arm posture of “White Crane Separates Its Wings” and alternately relax and activate our serratus anterior muscle we can feel the lower edge of our scapula move forward and back along the side of our ribs.)

# The Story of Dong Yong

Translated by Andy Lee with Sara Olsen



*For those who are wondering who the jade lady is and why she is working the shuttles of the loom, Master Yang Jun is fond of telling the following story:*

Once upon a time there lived a Jade Emperor in the Palace of Heaven with seven beautiful celestial daughters. The youngest daughter was very rebellious. One day, she convinced her sisters to go to the Magpie Bridge to play.

As her sisters played, the seventh daughter peeked through the fog of the clouds and watched mortal man. On both banks of the Yangtze River, she watched farmers till the fields, woodcutters chop firewood and fishermen cast their nets. The beautiful, fair youngest child was lonely and bored in her heavenly palace. As she watched married men and women, she too wanted a husband. She yearned for a life on earth. She envied man; she envied mortal man his life.

As she observed, she saw a man who studied hard, who lived a pious, respectful life and who cared for his seriously ill father. The seventh celestial daughter studied, listened and grew to admire him. This fair, heavenly lady was falling in love with this common, poor man.

In the mortal world, Dong Yong was very poor. He was so poor that in order to raise money for his father's proper burial, Dong Yong sold himself into slavery as a bond servant to Fu Guanbao. The seventh fairy maiden had sympathy for Dong Yong and in defiance of all the rules and regulations of heaven, descended to the world of man.

The seventh celestial daughter meets Dong Yong under a Huai Tree which is possessed by the spirit of a Chinese scholar. The Chinese scholar tree acts as a matchmaker for the fair lady of heaven, but Dong Yong is reluctant to marry.

Fu Guanbao who is a public official and a playboy wants the young Fair Maiden of heaven for himself. He comes many times to discuss marriage but the seventh youngest daughter of the Jade Emperor rejects Fu Guanbao each time.

The Chinese scholar tree tempts Dong Yong with promises of gain; consequently, Dong Yong finally agrees to wed the lovely youngest celestial daughter of the Jade Emperor.

On the surface, playboy and corrupt public official Fu Guanbao appeared to comply with his bond servant Dong Yong's wedding plans. However, Fu Guanbao is secretly preparing a treacherous plan to have the youngest, seventh celestial daughter for himself.

When Dong Yong reports to work with his wife, Fu Guanbao accuses him of breach of contract because he's married. The original contract was for a single man. For recompense for this breach of contract, Fu Guanbao makes a wager with the seventh female celestial being that if she can weave 100 brocades then Dong Yong is free, but if she loses the bet, Dong Yong's term is doubled. Fu Guanbao bets that the young fair maiden cannot weave 100 silk brocades, overnight.

The seventh fair maiden agrees.

In the nighttime, the seventh fair lady begs, cajoles and finally persuades her six elder celestial sisters to come down from the heavens to help weave, in secret, the silk brocades.

The 100 silk brocades were woven overnight and Dong Yong was free. After all the innumerable difficulties, Dong Yong had experienced this was a day of celebration. The old Chinese scholar tree spoke and the two young people bowed to heaven.

This is the well known story of how the seventh youngest celestial daughter became the loving wife of the bond servant, Dong Yong.

They lived happily ever after, until the Jade Emperor found out. But that's a story for another time.



# To compete or

*“Poor is the pupil who does not  
(Leonardo Da Vinci) ... And the  
his p*

By Roberta Lazzeri

**D**uring the Celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Shanxi Yang Style Taijiquan Association, last July, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Traditional Yang Style Invitational Tournament was held in China. I wish to share my thoughts on this subject.



Why does anyone take part in any competition? There are many reasons, from the wish to support the association in which one is involved and that organized the competition, to one's desire to challenge herself and others.

But now I want to discuss this from an educational viewpoint. Participating in a competition or a public demonstration event allows us to understand how we react in non protected situations. It helps us to better understand ourselves and to improve our reactions next time; ultimately it strengthens one's own character. Whoever takes part in any demonstration or competition knows the particular kind of stress that one feels before the event. It is not the same for everybody, of course, but facing it is a good thing for everybody, in order to learn how to master it. This is true for any kind of trial we must deal with, going from a school exam, to a presentation at a public meeting, to a job interview. Before facing these trials we experience some tensions coming from our dread and may only wish to run away. There's nothing wrong in being scared; only it is important to face our own fears, overcoming the wish to flee. Once we have confronted it, we will know it and we might be scared again next time in the same situation, but it will be different anyway and less overwhelming for sure.

Many people suffer from exam anxiety and avoid such situations because they fear them; the result they get is exactly what they were scared of: failure. They would have had at least a chance to pass, if they had just tried.

This is an integral part of the training of my students. I always urge them to compete, to give themselves a chance, assuming risk and responding to a challenging situation.

What are the benefits? They gain better knowledge of themselves; a greater trust in their own ability, openness to confrontation from an even position, which allows them to face various challenges in their life in a calmer, cooler way. Besides this, the particular kind of psychological - mental tension that we experience before a competition keeps us active and makes us younger. As the muscular tension keeps the muscles active, this challenge keeps the "mental muscles" active. It is not harmful, it is beneficial instead. Therefore, aside from being a good training to endure psychological tension, it is really training for the brain.

Can any instructor compete in a contest in which their students are involved? Yes, I think so. And what if they fail in the competition? Anyone can fail! The instructor is a human being and this is a good way to prove it!

Do they lose their trustworthiness in front of their students? Not at all; they model the qualities of a self-assured person, one who takes a real risk. A person that is able to take this risk is able also to take care of their responsibilities. The students will understand that this person will be able to take care of them, and can lead them individually to learn as much as possible. This kind of teacher can run the worse risk (which is the better outcome from my viewpoint) of getting lesser scores than their students, perhaps being surpassed by them.



# not to compete?

r:

*“Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master”*

*“Poor is the teacher who does not learn from his pupil”*


Why do I say that this is the best result for me? If a student of mine surpasses me, they will enhance my position in front of the others. First of all, because the successful student had a really good instructor! I agree with Leonardo Da Vinci, when he said, “Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master”. In fact, I had a hard time achieving my actual knowledge and ability, therefore if I can transfer these to my students, they will need to spend less effort or, even better, reach a higher level of knowledge than me with the same effort. Furthermore, it makes the other students understand that they too can have all of what is needed from their instructor and will learn all that they can. They will understand that the teacher gives them everything that they know at that moment, unreservedly, knowing that learning never ends.

I don't stop at Leonardo's dictum. If such was the case the teaching/learning process would be just transmission from one container to another. I believe, instead, that it is a creative process, in which both parties gain. Once I have guided my students to a good degree of knowledge, I will be free to learn from them, in the creative educational process, where student and teacher interact and exchange mutually. This spiral process will lead us to evermore deepen our abilities and knowledge. Receptive and creative students motivate me to teach to them, and I myself learn more and more. On the other hand, by teaching them I will be able to solidify my knowledge, making it steadier (I perceive this process as “compacting”). This settled knowledge will take a smaller space, will be automatic, I will not need too much energy to keep it, and I will be able to use my free energy to learn more, in a helical process. That's why I like to complete Leonardo's thought, “Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master” with this one: “and the teacher who does not learn from his pupil”.

So what is the function of an instructor? Teaching of course or, even better, teaching in such a way that the students can learn! One who has the skills to be able to adapt the teaching method to the learning abilities of each student, so that most of them can become independent and, if it pleases them, become instructors too. What kind of instructor am I, if I cannot admit that my students can also become instructors? A school must train students who are able to become emancipated, or it is not a school.

The example of the family is quite natural. In a family the parents raise their children, nurturing them and teaching to them what they know, with examples and words. This process has an inherent goal: that when the children are grown, their parents must leave them alone on their path. There will be exchange among them of course, but it will be an even one, and the parents will start to learn from their children, until the children take the turn of caring for their parents, in a natural and circular process.

What is the source of respect for parents or teachers? A person that is able to always renew herself, understanding the situations; who also knows when it's time to give way, and thus she gains respect.

Understanding where we are at in the training process is not always easy. Sometimes a public performance can help the instructor understand when their student is ready, and can help the student know if they are really ready to take flight. Participating in competitions/demonstrations outside of one's usual comfort zone helps this goal very well, besides being exciting and amusing! 

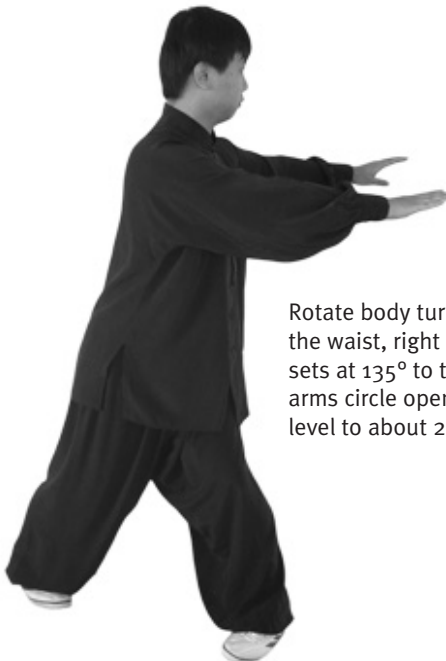
\* Roberta Lazzeri is an architect and a retired teacher of art education. She lives in Florence, Italy where since 2002 she leads with great passion several groups of Traditional Yang Style Taijiquan. Her students number, by now, more than fifty, and a good percentage of them (47%) have been working with her for more than three years.

## #62 Jade Lady Works the Shuttles

太極拳



Transition from Push



Rotate body turning the waist, right foot sets at 135° to the SE., arms circle open and level to about 225°.



Shift back to right leg, arms circling in, palms downwards.

Shift back, moving from the waist rotate the right foot inwards. Meanwhile, curve the left hand preparing to pull to the left.



Continue shifting forward, left knee bending as left palm strikes. End position: body vertical, torso open a little more than 45° to SE., right arm slightly higher than shoulder, hook hand at neck height. Left arm, knee, and foot aligned to E. Left palm is facing inwards, eyes gazing through left tiger's mouth.



Shift back to right leg, leading from the waist turn body to right, rotating left palm upwards. Set left foot in 135° to SW.



Sit back on left leg, drawing in left arm, gradually open the hook hand.



Continue shifting back to right leg, arms pointing back to 45°, right hand forming into hook hand at neck height, rotate left palm inwards.



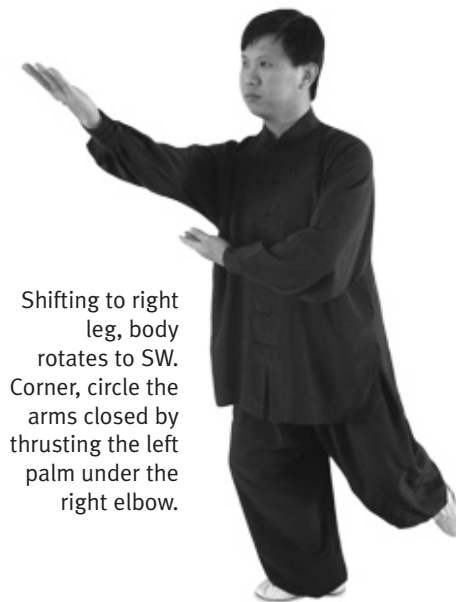
Draw in left foot then step out to begin bow stance, lightly touching left heel down, left arm warding off upwards: armpit open.



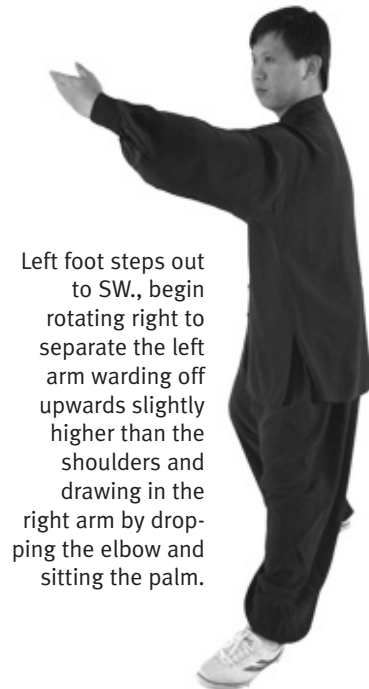
Shifting slightly forward set left foot flat, rotate left arm across and sit left palm.



Pick up right foot and reset to the W., gradually rotating right palm to face up.



Shifting to right leg, body rotates to SW. Corner, circle the arms closed by thrusting the left palm under the right elbow.



Left foot steps out to SW., begin rotating right to separate the left arm warding off upwards slightly higher than the shoulders and drawing in the right arm by dropping the elbow and sitting the palm.



## 太极拳



Rotating to the SW., left arm warding off upwards, bend left knee as right palm strikes to the corner, body facing SW.



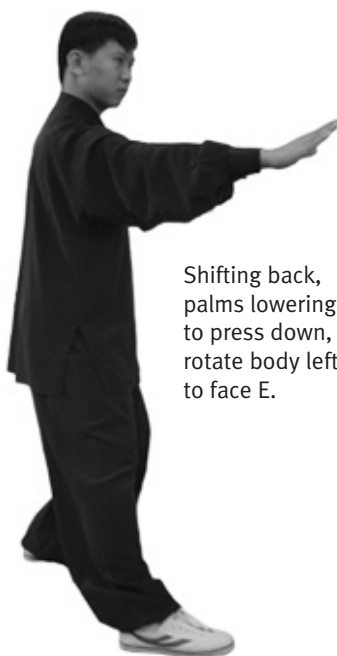
Sit back on right leg, rotating right, arms lowering to press down in front of the torso.



Use waist to rotate body to right, arms make a level circle as they pull to the right. Left foot turns in 135° to N.



Rotate body to the SE., bending the right knee and raising the right arm to ward off; strike to the SE. with the left palm while turning the left toes to the E.



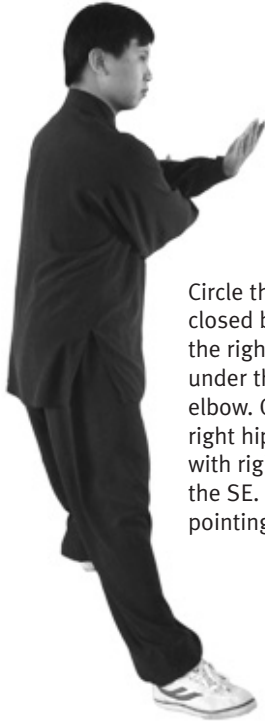
Shifting back, palms lowering to press down, rotate body left to face E.



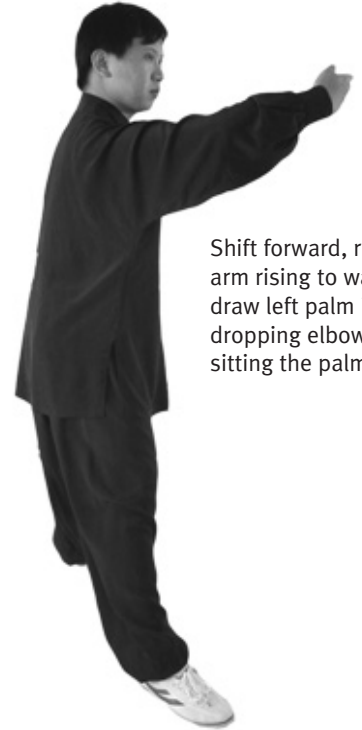
Pick up right foot, put it down with right toes pointing E.



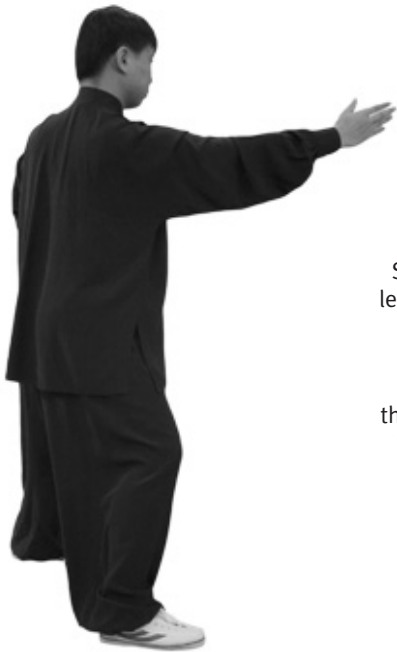
Shift weight to left leg, pick up right leg, drawing the right foot in towards your left ankle. Meanwhile, pay attention to rotate the arms in a level circle, turning the palms to face up.



Circle the arms closed by thrusting the right palm under the left elbow. Open the right hip and step with right foot to the SE. corner, toes pointing SE.



Shift forward, right arm rising to ward off, draw left palm in by dropping elbow and sitting the palm.



Shifting to right leg, body rotates to NE. corner, circle the arms closed by thrusting the left palm under the right elbow.



Turning body to right, left foot steps out to NE., rotate to separate the left arm warding off upwards slightly higher than the shoulders and drawing in the right arm by dropping the elbow and sitting the palm.



Begin shifting weight to the right leg, gradually rotate both palms upwards.

## 太极拳



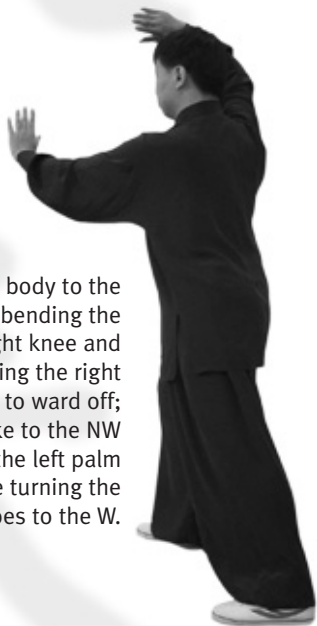
Rotating left to the NE., left arm warding off upwards, bend left knee as right palm strikes to the corner, body facing NE.



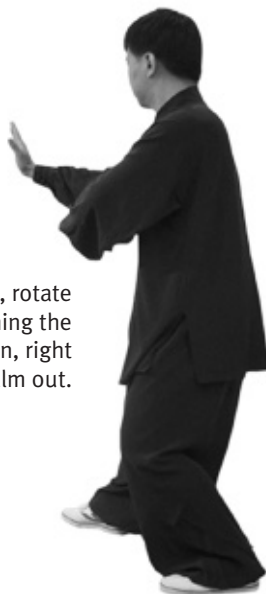
Sit back on right leg, arms pressing downwards.



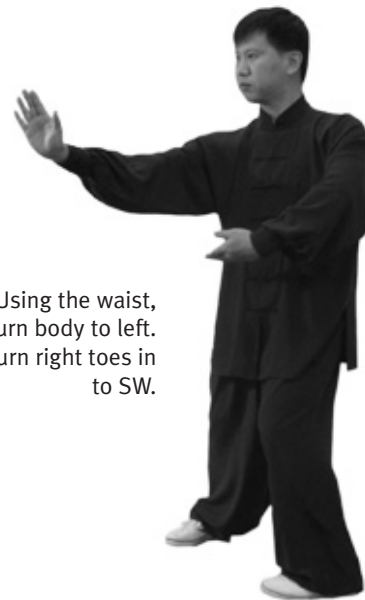
Use waist to rotate body to right, arms make a level circle as they pull to the right. Left foot turns in 135° to S.



Rotate body to the NW., bending the right knee and raising the right arm to ward off; strike to the NW with the left palm while turning the left toes to the W.



Sit back, rotate arms turning the left palm in, right palm out.



Using the waist, turn body to left. Turn right toes in to SW.





Shift weight to left leg, pick up right leg, drawing the right foot in towards your left ankle. Meanwhile, pay attention to rotate the arms in a level circle, turning the palms to face up.



Circle the arms closed by thrusting the right palm under the left elbow. Open the right hip and step with right foot to the NW. corner, toes pointing NW.



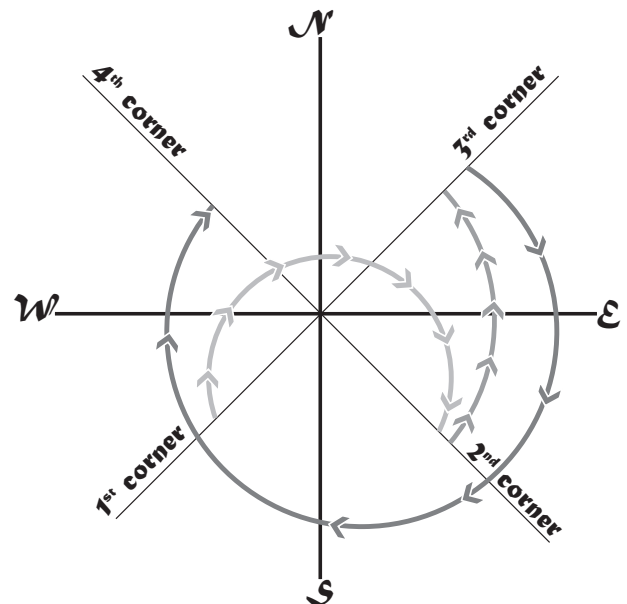
Shift forward, right arm rising to ward off, draw left palm in by dropping elbow and sitting the palm.



Sit back onto right leg, left leg steps straight forward to the S. Meanwhile, circle arms closed.



Bend left knee, turn body to right, separate arms, left arm wards off up to shoulder height, right arm presses down beside hip, body is straight up and down



# My Journey to Alviano



Prof. Franco Giordana

**A**lviano is a medieval village in Umbria, situated on the ridge of a hill, dominated by a wonderful castle with four towers at the corners and with a fantastic view of the valley that lies underneath with a small lake at its center.



Even if the charm of the countryside would make a trip to this site worthwhile, the reason why I visited this small town lies in a very personal love story. As it happens with almost every love story, it all started by chance. One could say this about anything that occurs without our planning, but the timing of this journey was so

perfect that one is compelled to think that there must be something of the Tao in this story

At the beginning of 2004, when I was 63 years old and without any previous experience of martial arts, a friend of

mine proposed that I go with her to a weekly lesson of Tai Chi at the gym where her son practiced Kung Fu. It seemed to me that this was just another occasion for exploring the vast world of esoteric experiences. A few months earlier I had started attending meetings on meditation techniques, thus coming in contact for the first time with the fact that there are deeper levels of my self than simply my mind. This was really quite a discovery for someone like me: an engineer, a professor of Applied Mechanics at the Milan Polytechnic. Besides, when I was in my teens I happened to view an amateur film made by one of the first Italian visitors to China and remembered being fascinated by the slow and gentle movements of people apparently doing gymnastics at the corner of the streets. So I accepted her proposal with pleasure.

After few lessons I was astonished by how little control I had on the movements of my limbs! I decided that once a week was not sufficient, I had to go at least twice a week at the gym. I started to read a few books on Tai Chi Chuan, discovering that my traditional approach to learning

(that is: reading books) didn't work in this case and I had to depend totally on the patient explanations of Giuseppe and Ylaria, my teachers. I also discovered that the practice of the form requires full integration between body and mind, thus achieving a deepened state of consciousness, the goal that I've learnt to appreciate from my training in meditation. I started to practice daily; every spare moment was an opportunity for grasping the bird's tail or making a little walk as a sequence of full steps. In a word: I had fallen in love with Tai Chi Chuan.

To get more acquainted with the form I kept examining the photos and reading the explanations in the book by Master Yang Zhenduo, trying to perform by myself the technique next to the one I'd just been taught at the gym. Alas with very poor results, but this allowed me to be very attentive when the teacher showed us the way it had to be performed and the key points of the complex motions, solving difficulties that I personally had experienced until that moment. It was also a way to impress in my memory the sequence so that it took me less than one year to learn the 103 hand form, with the aid of a few seminars I attended in the meantime. Since then I have missed only two or three times to practice the form at least once a day: it is not a matter of being a good pupil, I feel that something is lacking if I don't.

Meanwhile unexpected things were happening to me: I was feeling more relaxed during the day, not only when practicing, I started to notice when my shoulders were contracted and could immediately relax them (sink the shoulders!). Having lost seven kilos of overweight in the first few months, my posture became more upright, I felt more light and lively and in general more refreshed and energetic. Since I've started practicing Tai Chi I forgot my never ending winter colds, headaches or sufferings at my joints. But also the routine clinical tests tell me that I'm in better shape than before: my blood pressure with a tendency to hypertension has lowered, its values are well under warning levels and all the other parameters have gone into the mean range, included the hideous triglycerides that had always been much higher than they should be for as long as I could remember. One could say that this occurred only by chance, but I'm compelled to believe that there is something in this story about Tai Chi benefiting health.

And because of the connection between mind and body, inner and outer, also my behavior has changed: my attitude toward people is more open, I talk with them more easily and I'm more interested in learning from their experience. As a result of my studying Tai Chi I got acquainted with a lot of people that I would have never met otherwise, coming from environments and situations very different from mine, and I've largely benefited from the contact with them, enlarging my views. Could it be that this has also something to do with the practice of Tui Shou?

So I fell in love and still I'm in love with Tai Chi: this is the only reason why I've made the journey to Alviano, where I twice attended the seminars held by Master Yang Jun. The first was in 2004, when I completed the learning of the traditional hand form of the Yang Family, the second was from the 10th to 13th of May, when I took my ranking test

for the second level. Both times had been for me a very deep experience and for this reason Alviano will be dear to my heart forever.

The first time I discovered that taijiquan was really a martial art, not simply something between dance and gymnastics, full of grace and softness. It was evident seeing Master Yang Jun show how any gesture of the form could be used like a deadly weapon, something that my teacher Giuseppe had already shown us from time to time, but not in such systematic way. I definitely was and am not interested in harming anybody, but by starting to understand the purpose underlying the different techniques my movements have become more conscious and meaningful.

This second time the seminar put more focus on how the ten principles must be the guidelines for the practice and Master Yang Jun was very effective demonstrating how each of them could affect the correctness of the practice. He has also repeatedly shown how the different techniques of the form can find application in a myriad of apparently different situations, in which the movement can appear very different from the outside, but the principle and the energy involved are always the same. To master the principles is to master a variety of almost infinite possibilities.

I found of particular importance his suggestion to practice constantly, filling in this way our body with vital energy in the same way that a pot can be filled one drop at the time, never letting the level decrease because of days passed without practicing, a suggestion that I find perfectly adherent to my own experience. And, in answer to someone's question concerning other methods of moving one's Chi for health or martial purposes: first of all you need to accumulate a lot of energy in the Dan Tien before even thinking of moving it, secondly you need a good teacher to guide you, tinkering with energies without deep knowledge can be very harmful.

It is not only the presence of Master Yang Jun that makes these seminars so enjoyable to attend: there is also the beauty of the surrounding landscapes, the comfort of the accommodations, good food and wine, the perfect organization of Claudio, Giuseppe and their assistants and, last but not least, the opportunity of meeting so many people of different countries and different interests with the passion for the practice of taijiquan as the only common denominator. This is sufficient to make almost instantaneous new friendships, making you feel that really all of us in this world can be a friend to each other, promoting an attitude that is most needed in these days.

This year it was also for me the occasion to submit myself to the ranking test for the second level. At first I was a little scared by the prospect of being judged not by a local commission made of people who already know my practice and thus are in the position of evaluating my average standard, instead of only the single performance being displayed before their eyes for the first time. But then I considered that I was interested in the test not so much to gain a higher "title", but mostly to have my practice evaluated in order to confirm what I by myself think of it and to verify if it is sufficiently strong to sustain the pressure of



a test, so what better occasion than being evaluated by Master Yang Jun himself at the head of an international commission?

I was quite confident, if my teacher says that I'm ready, what should I fear? I continued my daily routine and limited my extra preparation to refreshing my memory, reading what I found on the website of the Yang Family relating to possible questions on theory. The day of the test I felt very calm, and answered the theory questions swiftly, these seeming not very difficult to me. When the moment for displaying my practice arrived I still was very calm, and listened with no anxiety to the instructions that Master Yang Jun gently gave us. But, to my great surprise, the instant I started performing the opening form, my calmness seemed to crash all at once: my hands started to quiver and my heart to throb inside my chest.

In vain I tried to calm myself, knowing well that I could not possibly perform correctly if I could not succeed in connecting inner and outer, as the eighth principle dictates. I was feeling that going on that way I would inevitably make some mistake, and this thought increased my anxiety until what I was fearing happened! I lost my balance while stepping at some point during the second section. Instead of being disappointed I felt relieved. What I feared had happened, so why should I still trouble about it? The mistake was part of the past and could not be changed, so I continued my practice without fear for what had already happened. After a while I lost my balance a second time while turning at the end of the second section, and that mistake also contributed to making me calmer. From then on I started to enjoy the form, experiencing yet another time how the 103 form has a soothing and healing effect, at the end you always feel better than when you started.

When I finished I was perfectly calm, glad that at least I had performed the correct sequence of the techniques, even if it seemed to me that I had given my worst performance in the last three months. Anyhow I felt well, I was there to be tested and tested I had been: whatever the outcome everything was OK.

The following day brought an epilogue to this story: to my great surprise Angela, the Brazilian member of the commission, came to me to congratulate for my performance, saying that it had been for her a wonderful experience to see how I was evidently nervous and under stress, but nonetheless my practice was there, the energy and the concentration were there, showing clearly that I had been practicing hard for a long time. What she said to me moved me deeply. For a long time I have had the feeling that by watching the practice of taijiquan one can tell a lot about the person who is performing. I was unsure that it was possible to gain such a deep insight. I felt as if all the usual barriers had dropped and that my soul had been exposed, evaluated as a whole, beyond the few errors caused by the stress of the situation and the many I'm not yet conscious of, because my form must still undergo a lot of refining work.

It was the practical demonstration of what Master Yang Jun had just said during the seminar: "practice daily, and the energy will accumulate in you, one drop at the time". The energy was there when I needed it, even if I was not able to feel it. ☯



## *Introduction by Han Hoong Wang:*

Suzanne has a full time heavy job but  
never skips her Taiji training.

She has studied sincerely 3 days each  
week, 6-8 hours of classes, without  
stopping for 9 years.

She has never missed any of  
Master Yang Zhenduo or Master Yang  
Jun's Seminars. She has contributed  
her talent and time to Taiji: teaching  
classes for the cancer community every  
Tuesday evening and performing often at  
our demonstrations to promote Taijiquan.  
As a result of all of these efforts, Suzanne  
won 3 Gold medals in China!

*It is my great pleasure to share and  
practice Taijiquan with her!*

# Competition Reflections

By Suzanne Trojanowski

In early 2007 I felt I had postponed getting ready for this summer's competition long enough, but as I started to practice I realized my preparation really began after the last competition in 2002 and was the summation of the last five years of studying and attending classes.

During the 2002 competition I was rather successful, but there I saw the top, top tai chi players and I realized how much further I had to go to reach their level. I am so fortunate to be able to train with Han Hoong Wang. Her knowledge is so deep and she shares it every time she's leading a class. I felt that in order to gain that deeper knowledge I needed to start over; so in 2002 I went back to a Section One class of the 103 Form. The moves in that first section are the basis of everything that comes later, so I focused on those core moves like grasp the bird's tail and brush knee. I also knew I needed to practice, practice and practice some more. I committed to attending as many classes as I could afford, financially as well as time wise. The more I worked with Han and the rest of the Michigan Center, the better I would become.

As time went by, my knowledge grew without my even realizing it. I found a training partner, Martine. We began our studies at about the same time and are at the same level. It helped to have someone else studying as hard as I was and willing to practice during holiday breaks from classes. Han let me know when it was time to begin push hands training and whatever else she told me I needed to do to get better, I did: from energy training, to new stretches, to studying the 10 principles on a deeper level, to beginning to teach. Whenever Master Yang Jun came to town I studied with him. Before I knew it, I was packing up my pink uniform and getting on a plane to Beijing



I wasn't nearly as nervous this time for the competition, I felt I couldn't have prepared anymore than I had. I was excited to learn that all of my competition would take place in one morning, suiting my natural energy. However, the day before the competition I caught the awful stomach bug making its way around among my fellow travelers. Words cannot describe how sick I felt, but I had worked

too hard and for too long to let some stomach bug take me down! So I got ready to compete. Even that morning at breakfast, Han was giving me last minute instructions on how to improve my form.

When my name was called to line up for the 49 Form, I was ready. As I began, I felt grounded, my flow was good, I was steady during the kicks and after the lotus kick I couldn't help but smile. No matter what my score was, I knew I couldn't have performed any better than I did and that made me happy not just for myself but for my teacher, my family including my Michigan Center family and the Association. The sword came up awfully quick after that, I wasn't completely settled for it but I just focused on each move. Saber is my favorite form so I just had fun with it.

The award ceremony was just so overwhelming with everyone congratulating me, and taking my picture and shaking my hand! I just couldn't believe it! The best part was participating in the winners' demonstration. I thought that was a wonderful addition to the closing ceremonies. I enjoyed performing with the group so much. I would like to thank everyone who stopped to congratulate me or share a kind word. The whole event is something that will live with me forever!



# The Evolution of Taijiquan

## *Further Conversations with Master Wu Wenhan*

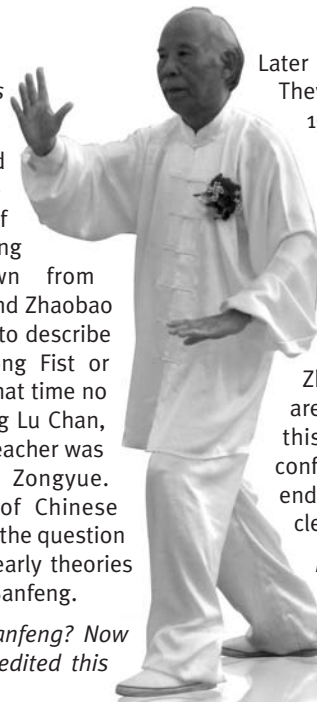
By Dave Barrett, translated by Yang Jun

**DB:** Can you tell us about the importance of Wang Zongyue and why his theories helped create Taijiquan?

**WW:** I am very happy to see you again and talk with you. Your question covers three points. First concerns the history of Taijiquan. Last time we spoke about Yang Luchan's return to Guangping town from Chenjiagou. At this time at Chenjiagou and Zhaobao town they did not use this term Taijiquan to describe their techniques. It was called the Long Fist or 13 postures. Who created Taijiquan? At that time no one could say for sure. According to Yang Lu Chan, his teacher was Chen Changxing and his teacher was Jiang Fa, and his teacher was Wang Zongyue. Beginning in 1911, with the creation of Chinese National Government, research began into the question of who created Taijiquan. One of these early theories was that Taijiquan was created by Zhang Sanfeng.

**DB:** Who started the story about Zhang Sanfeng? Now it seems that modern research has discredited this theory.

**WW:** Around 1910 a scholar named Guan Baiyi found a chapter in a book which reported that someone named Wang Zong taught internal martial arts in Shaanxi during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Guan Baiyi supposed that this Wang Zong was the same person as Wang Zongyue. But the problem here is that Wang Zong and Wang Zongyue were two different people. So that this misunderstanding led to the belief that Taijiquan should be traced back to Wu Dang Mountain. This is still a question debated by historians; maybe Taijiquan should be traced to the Taoist practices of Wu Dang Mt., maybe not. In 1921 Mr. Xu Yusheng published a book. He was a student of Yang Jianhou and a study/brother of Yang Chengfu. He described a carved funeral inscription on a stone. Hong Junshi was an important philosopher during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and his funeral stone describes a Taoist from Wu Dang Mt., Zhang Sanfeng, who dreamed that an immortal taught him the form motions.



Later this style was spread in Shaanxi by Wang Zong. They called this an internal martial arts style. In his 1921 book Mr. Xu Yusheng supposed that this art was Taijiquan. He also proposed that Wang Zong and Wang Zongyue were one and the same. From this theory emerged the idea that Taijiquan's founder was Zhang Sanfeng. The problem is that some 600 years separate Zhang Sanfeng from the Qing Dynasty and the careers of Chen Changxing and Yang Luchan. At the beginning of the Ming dynasty there was another Zhang Sanfeng, their names sound the same but are written differently. So also some people think this Zhang Sanfeng created Taijiquan. So this confusion stems from 1921. There are many loose ends to this theory, too many questions to have a clear picture.

**DB:** What is the current understanding of Zhang Sanfeng among historians?

**WW:** From the tourist's point of view, many consider Zhang Sanfeng the founder of Taijiquan. Before 1949, most people also believed this. In the 1930's the central martial arts university professor, Tang Hao, went to Chenjiagou three times during 1930-31. He thinks Taijiquan was founded by Chen Wangting and nothing at all connects back to Zhang Sanfeng. But there are many areas of debate about this. After liberation the government position also reflected this approach, and the Henan provincial officials have promoted this line as well. So many feel Chenjiagou is the hometown of Taijiquan but my feeling is that this is not correct. Who is the true founder of Taijiquan? Actually this was a gradual evolution. During the 1840's Yang Luchan, after his return to Guangping from Chenjiagou did not teach exactly what he had learned from Chen Changxing. He made many changes, for example the names of the motions were different.

**DB:** We talked about this in our last conversation and at this point historically there was a very interesting intersection



between Yang Luchan, Wu Yuxiang and the writings of Wang Zongyue.

**WW:** Let me tell you about this. Up to this point we have not found anything about the personal history of Wang Zongyue, what his background was or what type of martial arts he practiced or who he studied with. We can only examine his writings. Firstly he lived during the Qianlong era of the Qing dynasty (1735-1796). His writing style, the structure and phrases he used are also found in books written during this era. This is how we have placed him historically. If he was alive during the Ming dynasty he could not have referenced Qing dynasty phrases in his writings. Secondly, his writings referenced Confucius and Mo Tzu, so we can infer that he was educated and literate. This special style of writing called “the eight legged essay” is divided into 8 sections; every section requiring the same number of words and is organized thematically. I have written an article analyzing the style and structure of his writing. It is clear that he was a scholar and prepared for the imperial examinations. One aspect of his theory reflects the importance of a vertical or upright posture and equilibrium in balance; this comes from the Chuang Tzu and the Warring States period (475-221 BC). There was actually an imperial department during the Han dynasty (206BC-9AD) that enforced a leveling balance of economic factors and Wang Zongyue references this in his writings. This type of terminology shows us that he was highly educated.

**DB:** We are talking now about clues to the mystery of Wang Zongyue.

**WW:** Yang Luchan says that his teacher was Chen Changxing, Chen Changxing’s teacher was Jiang Fa, and Jiang Fa’s teacher was Wang Zongyue. From these comments we can place Wang Zongyue in the Qing dynasty. What kind of martial arts did Wang Zongyue teach at Chenjiagou? Not a sequence as we understand form practice today. He used Peng, Lu, Ji, and An to create a two-person exercise called Da Shou. All of his writings reference the interaction between two opponents. Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang used what they learned from the Chen system and combined these with local Yongnian techniques to create Taijiquan. From the form names, practice methods and theory we can see differences between Chen style and the Taijiquan of Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang. My earliest exposure to Chen style was seeing Chen Fake in the 1950’s. When he practiced it was quite external. The Yang and Wu/Hao styles are more inwards and reserved, expressing a very different flavor. For example, in the Chen style the stamping and explosive motions are quite apparent but in the other two styles these are much more internally expressed and hidden. There are many examples of this difference. Before Yang Luchan went to Beijing nobody knew these three words: Tai Ji Quan. The earliest use of this term can be found in the writing of Wang Zongyue.

**DB:** Why did he use this term Taijiquan in his writing?

**WW:** Because of his education, his martial training he


picked this. Generally speaking in Chinese martial arts there are 3 factors in naming a style: first is the location, where it was developed. A second source is animal names, thirdly, folkloric legends. Why did he pick the term Taijiquan? During the Qing dynasty Confucian ideals were foremost among intellectuals. There was a very popular author during the Qianlong era that began to use this term “Taiji” and his writings and Wang Zongyue’s are quite similar. The yin/yang philosophy pervades the “Song of Pushing Hands” and the “13 Chapters” authored by Wang Zongyue. We are talking about 160 years of development from the time of Yang Lu Chan and no matter what style of Taijiquan, they all follow these foundations laid down by Wang Zongyue.

**DB:** One last question. Why did the performance of the forms change? Was this because of Wang Zongyue’s theoretical contributions?

**WW:** Of course the theories were one important factor in this change. But also we must consider the Wu family’s background. At that time in Guangpingfu, the Wu’s were the richest family in the town. There is a class distinction at work here. In traditional Chinese society, the educated elite had a personal sense of decorum and this was reflected in their posture and bearing. How they carried themselves was different than a merchant or a farmer. The expressed gentility and the reserve of the aristocracy also began to affect the performance of strictly martial techniques. They didn’t want to jump around and slap themselves like common fighters. Old time martial arts were quite rough and raw, angry and intense.

**DB:** This is a fascinating idea that the social status of the players affected the motions of the forms and changed them. When Yang Luchan taught in the Forbidden City he was teaching the aristocrats and had to modify his style to fit their station in life?

**WW:** Yes, of course, the common slapping and kicking and jumping techniques were not suitable for this class of people. The motions became gentler and the energy more inwardly refined. We have no record of Yang Luchan’s practice style at that time, no photographs, but certainly his practice began to be affected by his station in the Forbidden City. We have a saying in China, “If you work with red dye you become red, if you work with ink you become black.” So today’s Yang style is open and gentle, reserved and calm. This is a result of these social pressures. The same holds true for the styles developed by Wu Yuxiang and Wu Jianquan. As I was watching Chen Zhenglei perform yesterday, his motions are more subtle than Chen Fake’s, so in modern Chen style we can also see this evolution from overt martial techniques to more refined motions.

**DB:** I want to tell you how much I appreciate our time together, I always learn so much from you and I look forward to speaking with you again about Taijiquan. 



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