



The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association

# Tai Chi Chuan

10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

SPECIAL EDITION



國際楊氏太極拳協會





**2009 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Association!** In celebrating this important milestone I want to look back and tell you why we created the Association and what the purpose of our work is.

Eighteen years ago I began travelling with my Grandfather internationally to teach Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan. As we worked together we had one feeling: when we taught seminars many people would come together to study but when we finished teaching everyone would go back home and we would lose contact with them. We felt as if the students we had met were like grains of sand slipping through our fingers. Everyone would go back to their individual practice and we had no unified feeling. One point about Taijiquan is that we want to have unified energy. When the energy is unified it becomes strong; my Grandfather and I wanted to keep everyone working together and improving, becoming like one big family. Even though we were not always together, we wanted to continue to work towards one purpose.

Our purpose in forming the Association was to spread the benefits of our practice. Those who practice and teach Taijiquan are well aware of the many benefits of daily practice. From many directions: for improving health, to balance the mind, we know that Taijiquan is

10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION - CONTENT



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

Letter from the President.....	2
Editorial: Drop by Drop .....	4
In the Footsteps of Yang Luchan .....	6
A Conversation with Chen Zhenglei .....	9
The Birth of Taijiquan.....	13
Master Profile: Ma Hailong .....	17
Master Profile: Sun Yongtian .....	20
Building a Strong Foundation.....	25
Yang Zhenduo Verbatim.....	28
Wu De: Martial Virtue .....	30
The Tao of Learning Taijiquan .....	34
The Evolution of Taijiquan.....	40
Basic Principles of Taijiquan.....	42
Push Hands: Skills and Theory .....	47
The Annotated Lexicon .....	52
Taijiquan Questions and Answers.....	54
80th Birthday Interview .....	56
Sources for Taiji Philosophy.....	61
The Nature of Balance.....	62
The Annotated Lexicon: Zhong Ding.....	67
Taiji and Multiple Sclerosis.....	70



good for people. We want to share this Art, not just in a small group, all over the world people can benefit from this practice. This is the reason we work together. This is who we are: we study, practice and teach Taijiquan, sharing with everybody.

Our mission is to make Taijiquan widely available so more people can join the practice. We created the Association to bring Traditional Yang Family Taijiquan practitioners together to promote a system that would bring our family's standard of practice to a worldwide audience. As my Grandfather and I travelled, we were not only teaching students, but also looking for those people who might become teachers. We hoped to bring these people along and help them with the transition from learning to teaching Taijiquan. We weren't sure if this could be done. Looking back on the past 10 years, this is the most important development in the Association. By creating the ranking system to evaluate and promote Taiji skills, we now have a solid corps of skilled instructors. We are developing a program to continue to train more teachers and help them become certified instructors.

We started in 1999 with only a few Centers and 300 members. In the past 10 years more than 6,000 people have joined the Association and we currently have over 2,000 active members. What is most important is that over the years I have seen the friendship grow between our Directors, instructors and their students and we really are like brothers and sisters in one big family. Our Directors travel to other Centers to teach. This is a wonderful thing that they can share their experience with others. When we are united we are strong, when we work in one direction we can succeed. My Grandfather feels very deeply about this. Our work is not only for the propagation of Traditional Yang Style. In China we often say that, "under heaven all Taijiquan practitioners are one big family". Naturally, we started

by focusing on our family style but our dream is to help all styles of Taijiquan to spread and help the people of the world.

Looking ahead, we want to continue to develop Yang Style, but also to bring all styles of Taijiquan together to create a University of Taijiquan without walls. We want to share our organizational experience with the other families of Taijiquan. Our International Symposium on Taijiquan this summer is an important first step in this direction. It is my deep hope that you will enjoy this important event and that your practice will benefit from the sharing of knowledge between Taijiquan styles. We want people to know that Taijiquan is not just Yang or Chen Style but there are different traditions and flavors of practice.

Our Association is continuing to develop and as we become more mature our programs will reflect this growth process. We now have 30 Centers in 12 countries. More significantly, we have certified instructors and many more study groups in other countries as well. If we want more people to benefit from Taijiquan practice, we need more people to teach it. Our goal is to train more teachers who can skillfully share their knowledge in many, many places, not only where we have created Centers. From a small start 10 years ago, this is where we are today and we have more programs and plans for the future!

In closing, allow me to personally thank each and every one of you for your support over the years. Often, when I travel the world to teach, I see familiar faces year after year at the Seminars and without this continuing interest in our work, the Association would not be as strong as it is today. My life is very different now from when I first arrived here from China ten years ago. On behalf of my family, your support has made our dreams come true, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Yang Zhen Duo**  
*Chairman*

**Yang Jun**  
*President*

## **EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

**Han Hoong Wang**  
*V.P.*

**Mei Mei Teo**  
*V.P.*

**William W. Wojasinski**  
*V.P.*

**Nancy Lucero**  
*President assistant*

**Pat Rice**  
*Adviser*

**Fang Hong**  
*Secretary, Department of Membership Services*

**Marco Gagnon**  
*Department of Outreach and Development*

**Dave Barrett**  
*Journal Editor*  
dave@yangfamilytaichi.com

**Yang Jun**  
*Department of Training Standards*  
yangjun@yangfamilytaichi.com

**Bill Walsh**  
*Department of Public Relations*  
bill@yangfamilytaichi.com

**Mei Mei Teo**  
*Department of European Affairs*  
meimei@yangfamilytaichi.com

**Angela Soci**  
*Department of South American Affairs*

**Claudio Mingarini**  
*National Training Technical Director of Italy*

## **INTERNATIONAL YANG STYLE TAI CHI CHUAN ASSOCIATION**

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

### **USA**

P.O. Box 786  
Bothell, WA 98041 USA  
Tel: +1 (425) 869-1185

### **SOUTH AMERICA OFFICE**

Rua Jose Maria Lisboa,  
612-sala 07 Sao Paulo - SP CEP -  
01423-000 Brazil  
Tel. 55-11-3884.8943

### **EUROPE**

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





## *Drop by Drop*

By Dave Barrett

In pulling together articles from our past issues for this 10th Anniversary Special Edition of the Journal, we feature the five Masters who grace us with their presence here at the International Tai Chi Chuan Symposium. We also include pieces that illuminate the philosophical and strategic foundations of Taijiquan study.

I apologize for the preponderance of articles from yours truly. I'll spare you the enumeration of the exquisite agonies inflicted upon editors of all volunteer publications running up against a drop dead printing date. Necessity is truly the mother of invention. There have, of course, been many other contributors who have sent in insightful and sometimes courageous articles. I would be remiss in my duties if here, I failed to

encourage you to do the same!

I have been blessed over the years to work with three gifted translators. Jerry Karin is whip smart. A devoted student of both Taijiquan and classical Chinese, he possesses a musician's sense of timing in working within the longer rhythms of a conversation.

Jeremy Blodgett lived my dream. After meeting the Masters Yang in 1993, he quit his job, studied Chinese and moved to their hometown of Taiyuan in Shanxi Province. His brilliant performance during our 80<sup>th</sup> birthday interview with Master Yang Zhenduo was the result of this dedication. That trip to Wutaishan in 2005 was the last time I saw Jeremy. His tragic death only a few months later came as a deep shock to us all.



Master Yang Jun learned English by the seat of his pants. With little formal training, his skills have come a long, long way. He brings an extraordinary level of entrée to the table. In his presence the Masters answers are heartfelt and detailed. His spontaneous, telegraphic style has provided me with the DNA of these encounters. My work has been to nourish his translations with original intent in mind.

Words fail me when it comes to our graphic designer, Marco Gagnon from Quebec, Canada. He has taken our humble 3-page newsletter and with each issue has developed his vision and unique style for our publication. To have such an artist, who also practices and teaches the entire curriculum of Traditional Yang style Taijiquan, is a heaven sent gift.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to meet many of Taijiquan's leading exponents. In conversation, they have illuminated many of the facets of our practice: from history, to philosophy, to the myriad details of Taijiquan's techniques. One thread that runs through all of these interviews is the their sincere hope that we will continue to improve our skills through daily practice. Master Chen Zhenglei reminds us of the cruel metric of this traditional approach, "We have a saying in China that if you miss one day of practice, you lose ten days of development."

In my most recent conversation, Master Yang Jun also touched on this theme, "Do we practice for fighting? You can't fight everyday! But, we still keep practicing, because this practice helps you store your energy. When Qi is stored, the spirit is raised up. Your practice foundation gives you this spirit. Daily, daily, daily like there is one drop of water falling into a stream which gradually become a river. When the river is full, the branches are also full. This is how we extend the Qi throughout the body."

Master Wu Tunan was a famous Taijiquan historian and disciple of Wu Jianquan. Born in 1885, he lived for 104 years passing away in 1989. His words are a guiding light for my own practice, "The hour or so of daily practice becomes a time of joy, tranquility and self-achievement. Persistence then is no longer a problem." I share them with you, gentle reader, and entreat you, after having read this special edition, to get out there and practice!



# Tai Chi Chuan

*Editor-in-chief*  
**Yang Jun**

*Editor*  
**Dave Barrett**

*Graphic Design*  
**Marco Gagnon**

*Contributors*  
**Jeremy Blodgett**  
**Mui Gek Chan**  
**Jerry Karin**  
**Andi Lee**  
**Sarah Olsen**  
**Audi Peal**  
**Lu Shengli**  
**Helen Smeja, MD**  
**Holly Sweeney-Hillman**  
**Karen Thaxton**  
**Yang Jun**

All Tai Chi Chuan enthusiasts are invited to submit articles, letters, and pictures for publication. Both critical and complimentary letters concerning the form and content of this journal are welcome.

Please send correspondence in electronic format to:  
editor@yangfamilytaichi.com  
or mail to:

**International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association**  
P.O. Box 786  
Bothell, WA 98041 USA  
Tel: +1 (425) 869-1185

© All rights reserved.  
Any reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.

PRINT IN USA

Please recycle





At Yang Luchan's House

Yang Luchan's house at Chenjiagou



## In the Footsteps of *Yang Luchan*

By Dave Barrett

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

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

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

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

Our small group included Yang Luchan's great-great-great-grandson,



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

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

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

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

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

The road to Chenjiagou



Yang Jun at Yang Luchan's Grave



Yang Luchan's hiding place







Yang Luchan neutralizes the Bird

At Yang Chengfu's grave



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

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

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

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





## A Conversation with Master Chen Zhenglei

By Dave Barrett, translated by Master Yang Jun

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

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

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

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

**CZ:** Yes!

**DB:** Is this done completely by hand?

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

**DB:** So then it is spread out to dry?

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

**DB:** How is it used?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

**CZ:** What you have mentioned about other students, I also have this problem, this same feeling. We want to create an ongoing interest that leads to regular practice without stopping. At the beginning one learns the basic forms and motion sequences. At that time if you don't have a good teacher to give you corrections and guidance it's difficult to continue your development. It's easy to drop out of the practice. On the other hand, with a good teacher this is less likely to happen. But if every day you practice in the same way it is natural to become bored. So what can you do? You can pick up your sword or saber, different weapons, practice a little push hands. If you eat the same meal every day you'll lose your taste for that dish. When your teacher can lead you to the level where the external techniques are combined with internal intent, when the Qi can permeate the whole body, when you have that feeling, then with each practice there will be improvement. When this feeling improves with each practice you can spend less time with your teacher and more time in self study. It will be easier to continue because you have this feeling. Without this rich feeling during practice it is easy to lose interest and drop out.

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

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

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

**CZ:** In my younger years when I practiced I was quite serious about my work. My whole life I have followed the teachings of my uncles, Chen Zhaopei and Chen Zhaokui. When they taught I always watched very carefully. At that time my deep

feeling was that I wanted to grow up to be like them. I listened to their voices and watched their motions closely. At that time there were no recorders or video cameras. My eyes were the camera and my mind was the recorder. If I needed to check something I would sit down, close my eyes and review. If I was not satisfied with my practice I would check my memories and think about my Uncles. Sometimes I would hear them criticizing my efforts, using rough language to spur my practice onwards.

**DB:** So you still hear this?

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

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

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

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





# 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> National Taijiquan Symposium. The papers he presented 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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, the men 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 his 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 Yongjian 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 Bagua and the other is Shaolin? Because of these three points. From my point of view Taijiquan was not simply originated in Chenjiagou. After these two gentlemen 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!







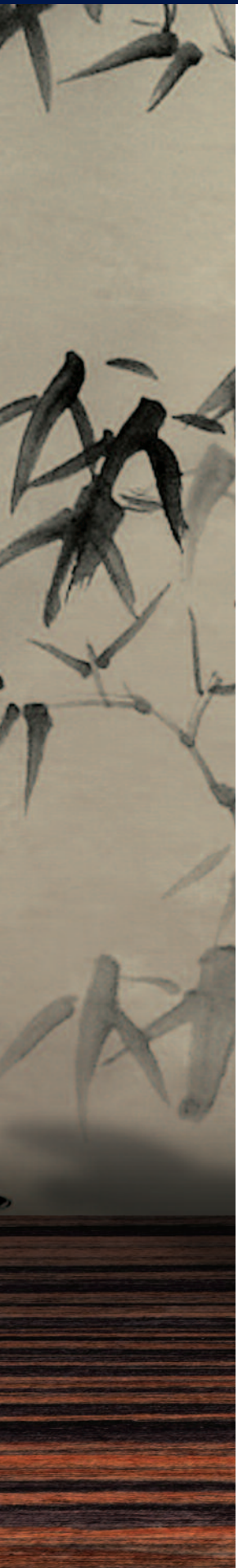
# Master Profile: Ma Hailong

*In the past we said,  
“Exercise your body to improve  
your spirit”.*

*This is a Confucian principle.  
This is an important element of our  
philosophy: body, mind and spirit, heart,  
your thought process; all can be improved by  
daily practice.*

By Dave Barrett  
Association Journal Editor

Master Ma Hailong was born in 1935 into one of China's most distinguished martial arts families. His great-grandfather, Wu Quanyou (1834-1902), was an officer of the Imperial Guards Brigade in the Forbidden City. At this time, Yang Luchan (1799-1872) was a martial arts instructor in the Yellow Banner camp and for many years Wu Quanyou studied with Yang Luchan and his eldest son, Yang Banhou. Due to the protocols of the day, he could not be accepted as a direct disciple of Yang Luchan as Master Yang had aristocratic students and a military officer could not be in the same class as these more august individuals. However, Wu Quanyou's training was with Yang Luchan directly and over the decades of his study he became renowned for his skills in interpreting and neutralizing an opponent's energy.



Master Ma's grandfather, Wu Jianquan (1870-1942), was a cavalry officer who subsequently taught Taijiquan and developed from his father's art what is now the Wu Style. Utilizing the "small frame" his father had learned from Yang Luchan, he made important modifications utilizing narrower circles and the distinctive foot work and body positions now seen in Wu Style Taijiquan. In 1914 along with his colleagues Yang Shaohou, Yang Chengfu and Sun Lutang, he began teaching publicly at the Beijing Physical Culture Research Institute. As he taught the general public he continued to make modifications to his style, refining the more overt martial techniques in much the same way that Yang Style has, making the motions slower and smoother for a wider appeal. In 1928, Wu Jianquan moved to Shanghai and formed the Jianquan Taijiquan Association in 1935.

Master Ma's father, Ma Yueliang (1901-1998), began studying with Wu Jianquan at the age of 18. In 1930 he married Master Wu's daughter, Wu Yinghua (1906-1996), and served as deputy director of the Shanghai Association.

From the age of 6, Master Ma began learning Taijiquan in this especially rich environment. Both his parents were accomplished teachers and his uncles had studied intensively with his grandfather. He remains dedicated to this day to sharing his family's traditions.

The war years with Japan and the subsequent Revolution were not kind to Master Ma's family. One of his uncles languished in prison for 30 years. The Shanghai Jianquan Taijiquan Association went underground during the Japanese occupation as the Japanese banned any martial arts activities. Master Ma's eldest uncle, Wu Kungi, moved to Hong Kong and established a new headquarters for the Association which has flourished internationally and is now headed by his nephew, Eddie Wu. Master Ma's family had to continue to practice underground during the Cultural Revolution and after 30 years in the shadows, the Shanghai Jianquan Taijiquan Association re-opened in 1978. During a brief visit with Master Ma last summer in Taiyuan I had a chance to ask him about this:

**DB:** *For how many years did your family have to practice underground?*

**MH:** From 1948, the Shanghai Wu Style Association was closed until 1978.

**DB:** *During those 30 years were people still practicing Wu style?*

**MH:** Because Wu style Taijiquan had a very good foundation in the Shanghai area even though our Association was closed, many people still practiced.

**DB:** *So when the Association re-opened in 1978, this must have been a very happy day for your father and mother. From that point the rest of the world began to learn about your father Ma Yueliang and he began to travel.*

**MH:** My father went to Europe with my mother and began to teach internationally.

**DB:** *So now the Shanghai Association is going strong?*

**MH:** From my point of view, I feel we could be stronger. One of the difficulties in Shanghai is that not very many young people are joining our practice. Most of our members are middle-aged and older. If we don't have young people studying this is a problem. I am putting more energy into developing younger people and drawing them into our practice.

**DB:** *Are young people in China today so busy: focused on career, on gaining wealth, is this why they are not interested?*

**MH:** This is one reason, secondly many new sports have recently become popular in China especially basketball, tennis and soccer. Another reason is that our traditional practice takes a long, long time to develop. It's not like one or two days of practice or a few months, or even one or two years of practice to get a good result. This makes it difficult to attract young people.

**DB:** *My feeling is that Tai Chi practice gives one a certain amount of peace, contentment, and happiness that other sports do not. This is a special quality. All over the world there is the same problem with young people, so many choices and distractions. Once they can taste this peace through practice, this may draw them in to study Tai Chi.*



**MH:** What you say is excellent and I agree with your point. We are starting to emphasize this in our outreach activities to young people.

**DB:** *I've read that your father, Ma Yueliang's special skill was central equilibrium and his ability to neutralize incoming force. Can you describe how Wu style developed this skill?*

**MH:** The ability to neutralize energy developed because early on the founders of Tai Chi realized that there was something missing from other styles of Chinese martial arts. They also combined Chinese philosophy with their techniques. For example, neutralizing incoming force does not just depend on using your own strength; it utilizes the opponent's energy to strike back.

**DB:** *So how do we do this? By rotating the central axis of the body?*

**MH:** Basically you need to find the point of balance in your opponent and make it easier for them to lose their center.

**DB:** *Many say that it was very difficult to find your father's center.*

**MH:** His skill at Push Hands was extraordinary. Most opponents could not find his center. This technique comes from long practice. My father and uncles and members of their generation practiced all the time. My brother, Ma Jiangbao, lives in the Netherlands and his technique is pretty good, almost like my father's. He has some students who are quite skilled as well. So from daily, daily practice they begin to acquire this skill.

**DB:** *This ability goes back to Wu Quanyou and his development of yielding skills and can we consider this a special quality of Wu style Tai Chi Chuan?*

**MH:** For Wu style, neutralizing ability is one standard aspect of our practice. Another key to our practice is that it must be quiet, calm and tranquil. If you cannot enter into tranquility during practice, you cannot develop your skills very well. In our Wu Style, we have 5 concepts that guide our practice: 1<sup>st</sup> is calm, 2<sup>nd</sup> is slow, 3<sup>rd</sup> is lightness, 4<sup>th</sup> is serious practice, and the 5<sup>th</sup> is non-stop study. You must practice every day!!

**DB:** *Many international students practice maybe once or twice a week, perhaps only during class time, and take the rest of the week off. So what can you say to these friends to encourage them to practice every day?*

**MH:** In practicing Tai Chi, I feel it is best to practice every day for a sufficient period of time, for example, every day for an hour of practice. It doesn't matter morning or evening, that's OK, but you should do it every day. So we have a concept in Tai Chi that describes conserving or storing vital energy. It's like you are saving money in a bank! By practicing every day you are gathering and storing this energy constantly. If you practice one day and stop for two days you won't improve. My father and uncles practiced 5 hours a day. Every day they would arise before dawn at 5 am to begin practice, until 8 am and then practice in the evening as well. It is a special aspect of Tai Chi study that you cannot learn in one day; it is a very gradual process.

**DB:** *What draws the student onwards, to practice more intensively? My personal feeling is that my practice brings me relaxation, peace and happiness. Is this a correct focus for our development of serious practice?*

**MH:** In the past we said, "Exercise your body to improve your spirit". This is a Confucian principle. This is an important element of our philosophy: body, mind and spirit, heart, your thought process, all can be improved by daily practice. More importantly, you are not just practicing to improve yourself; your practice affects others as well. You develop a sense of equanimity. Through your exercise this has a positive effect on society. One Confucian saying was, "good people also love other people". Another aspect of this philosophy is that you should focus on taking care of your family. Thirdly, use your energy to help society.

**DB:** *My personal experience is that Tai Chi practice has a very positive affect on the personal, familial and social spheres of the student.*

**MH:** Practicing Tai Chi Chuan has this ultimate result: not only is it good for your personal health, it effects others as well. So that when you practice, not only focus on your personal development, but also take care for other people. This is very important.

**DB:** *Let me thank you for these special insights. Many of our international group here in China talked to me about you by saying, "Oh, Master Ma Hailong, he seems so happy. He seems like a very nice man." After having talked with you, I can understand more about how you personally have this special quality. It comes from your attention to everyday practice. Thank you so very much.*

**MH:** After I return to Shanghai I'll send you some more research materials to continue your study. ☯





# Master Profile: Sun Yongtian

By Sun Yongtian,  
as told to Dave Barrett  
Translated by Mui Gek Chan

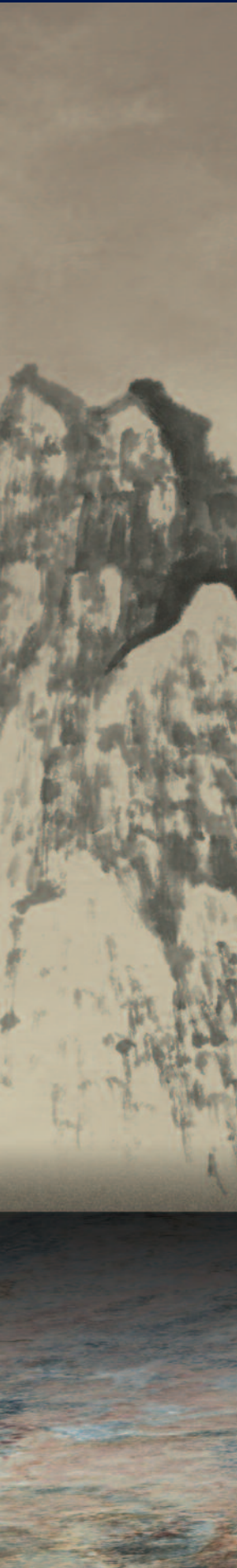
I was born in 1948. Since my youth, I was always interested in the martial arts. I practiced many types of martial arts, including long fist and tang fist. In the 1970's, I was successful in many of the martial arts competitions I entered. In May of 1982, under the recommendation of Zhang Yongan, I met my teacher Sun Jianyun for the first time. Frankly speaking, although I had learned martial arts since I was young, I had no knowledge of Taijiquan.

When I first met Sun Jianyun, we hit it off just like old friends. She vividly described the history of Sun style Taijiquan - how her father









Sun Lutang (1861-1932), developed Sun style Taijiquan, and many exciting stories about his skills. For example, “A famous Japanese martial artist was so determined to test Sun’s skills that he convinced the Emperor of Japan to send him to China to fight Sun. In 1921, the Japanese martial artist came to visit Sun and, speaking through an interpreter said, ‘I heard that you practice a Chinese martial art method which uses soft to overcome hard. Well, I am hard! How do you want to fight me? I will fight with any rules or any weapons.’ Sun turned to the interpreter and said, ‘Since he is a guest in our country, I will let him decide.’ The Japanese challenger said, ‘I am going to use hard strength to take your arm in a lock and break it. Let’s see if you can use your soft energy to overcome that!’ Sun, who at 5’7” barely came to the Japanese man’s shoulder, was willing to give it a try. Concerned that Sun could simply move his feet and get away from the lock the challenger said, ‘I want you to overcome this technique without running around.’ Sun said, ‘I can accommodate you.’ Sun had the spectators move all of the furniture aside and cleared a space on the floor. He said, ‘I will lie on the floor, your students can hold my feet, and you can apply your technique. I’ll even put my other arm behind my back.’ Sun laid on the floor and the Japanese martial artist took hold of his arm. The interpreter counted, ‘One, two, three!’ At the count of three Sun quickly pulled his free arm from behind his back and applied a point strike to his opponent’s stomach. This point strike caused the Japanese challenger to lose his grip on Sun’s other arm and Sun hopped up. The opponent was not so easily put off and followed Sun. Sun struck a few points on his opponent’s body and threw him into a bookcase. The interpreter shouted, “You’ve hurt him!” Sun said, ‘He’ll be all right. Tell him when he catches his breath we can try it again.’ His opponent, admitting defeat, refused to try again.”<sup>1</sup> This was something I had not known and Taijiquan became deeply ingrained in me.

From then on, Sun style Taijiquan became a part of my life and changed the way I value life.

Sun Lutang’s daughter, Sun Jianyun was born in Beijing, in 1914. Their ancestral home was in Wangdu, Hebei Province. She was a famous martial arts expert in China, lineage bearer and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation descendant of Sun style Taijiquan, one of China’s top ten martial arts masters, vice-chairman of Beijing Wushu Association, director of Beijing Xingyiwan Institute, and director of Beijing Sun Style Taijiquan Institute. When Sun Jianyun was young, she received tutelage at home, was skilled both intellectually and in the martial arts, and deeply understood the essence of Xingyi, Bagua, and Taijiquan. In her youth, she studied calligraphy and wrote poetry. Later, she went to Beiping Huabei Arts Academy and studied Chinese painting, specializing in landscapes and portraits of women. She had exquisite brush techniques and was then one of the top four up and coming artists.

As I gained more exposure and understanding, along with Teacher Sun’s magnetic personality, I found myself drawn to Taijiquan. Teacher Sun had a wide and deep knowledge, an open mind, great inner qualities and a high level of martial arts skill. Teacher Sun had great character and virtue, and taught us how to practice martial arts in society. That is, being morally upright and righteous. She often encouraged us to practice the form, cultivate our health and to have an open mind.

I was deeply affected by her words and manner, and as a result, I diligently studied Taijiquan so as to continue and spread Sun style Taijiquan. At the same time, at work as well as in my social life, it also affected the people around me.

Sun Lutang created his style by combining Xingyi, Bagua, and Taijiquan into a unique martial art. It is one of the five main styles of



Taijiquan in China, namely, Chen, Yang, Sun, Wu, and Wu/Hao. Sun Lutang learned Taijiquan from Hao Weizhen. Sun was able to attain a high level of skill, and achieved a deep understanding. Under Hao Weizhen's tutelage, Sun Lutang was able to master the essence of Wu/Hao style Taijiquan. As a result, he developed the three-in-one, Sun style Taijiquan. He combined features from the two other "internal" martial arts styles: utilizing Xingyiquan's approach of combining internal and external into one and Baguaquan's emphasis on combining movement and stillness into one to create his style of Taijiquan.

Sun style features a high stance and is a lively, open/close Taijiquan, with a lot of movements and many self-defense mechanisms. The foot work advances and retreats naturally, the torso position is upright, the best angle for learning purposes, and is easy on the knees. Sun style is like moving clouds and flowing water, continuous without interruption, advancing and retreating connected, the movements are agile, circular, lively and compact. When advancing or retreating, every turn of the body has an opening/closing method that is connected. In addition, it is good for health purposes. As a result, Sun style, along with the other methods of Taijiquan, is known to the Chinese people as being beneficial for health and longevity, good for the young as well as the old.

In Sun style Taijiquan, whether advancing or retreating, the body needs to be centered, head suspended, chest loosened, and at all times one must be calm, comfortable, and relaxed. Like flowing water and falling leaves, the motions need to be flowing and coordinated. When moving, there is no bobbing up and down, or swaying left and right, but, with lively steps causing the center to be continuously stable and yet be in motion. One must pay



attention to the merging of the three: Xingyi, Bagua, and Taijiquan. However, the forms must originate from Taijiquan's special qualities, as we do not show the specific energies of Xingyi and Bagua's movements. To show Sun style Taijiquan's flavor, the movements need to be accurate, relaxed, supple, connected, and the mind needs to be calm.

In 1993, at the martial arts conference held at the Beijing Xijiao Longquan Hotel, Wu Bin, president of the Beijing Wushu Institute, suggested to Teacher Sun that she look for a successor. Later, Teacher Sun told me that she wanted me to be the lineage bearer and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation exemplar of Sun style Taijiquan. I was deeply moved by her gesture, but was hesitant to accept the offer. But, after two years with no one raising any objections, I reluctantly accepted the honor. From that point on, I have worked tirelessly to continue and promote Sun style Taijiquan.

Unfortunately, in October of 2003, Teacher Sun Jianyun passed away. She left a will stating that Sun Yongtian (same last name, but of different family) is the sole successor to her. Witnesses to her will included her cousin, Zhang Wenyi, disciples: Dai Jianying, Zhang Maoqing, and her brother's granddaughter, Sun Qi. ☯

*(Sun Yongtian is chairman of the board of a state-owned automotive sales and service company. He is the vice-chairman of Beijing Wushu Association, and the director of the Sun Style Taijiquan Research Institute.)*

1 Sun, Lutang, *A Study of Taijiquan*, translated by Tim Cartmell, Berkeley, Ca., North Atlantic Books 2003, pgs.29-30





# Building a STRONG





# FOUNDATION

## *Stance Work in Tai Chi Chuan Practice*

An Interview with Masters Yang Zhen duo and Yang Jun

CONDUCTED BY DAVE BARRETT,  
TRANSLATED BY JERRY KARIN

This July when the Masters were in Portland, Oregon for the Seminar, they were kind enough to agree to an interview after a busy day of teaching. We ended up talking for over two hours. The first part of the conversation concerned the ethical values of the Chinese Martial Traditions in general and Tai Chi Chuan in particular. This discussion will be featured in our next issue.

The second topic of our conversation was more technical in nature, dealing specifically with foot work, leg training and stance work. As a starting point for this discussion I mentioned that Yang Laoshi had written at length concerning this topic in his most recent book. Here is an excerpt from his book to set the stage and then our conversation follows.

“When you make a bow step, as the weight shifts from one foot to the other, you should pay attention to the symmetrical arrangement of the two opposing forces - one leg pushing and the other pushing back or resisting. Whether the front leg is pushing backward and the back leg resisting, or the back leg is pushing forward and the front leg resisting, the forces must be coordinated, so as to avoid pushing out too hard or resisting

too hard, or pushing out empty without any compensating resistance. I hope you will work hard to incorporate this point in your form.

If you can achieve just the right balance in this, it will create favorable conditions for upper and lower body to work in concert during transitional moves. When extending the weighted leg to its ultimate position in a bow step, just as in the extension of an arm, extend until it is almost fully extended but not quite. If you over-extend then it becomes forced and looks stiff. If the back leg is bent too much, the pushing force cannot come out, and it will seem as if you have a lot of power but can't use it.

The resistance of the empty leg goes through a process of gradual engagement. First touch the floor with the heel, continue by allowing the flat of the foot to touch, then the toes grab the floor, and then let the knee bend forward, letting the bending knee and shin slightly incline forward and increasing the resistance from the front leg so as not to allow the knee to pass the toe.

This way, with one leg pushing and one leg resisting, neither force subsiding or becoming too strong,

the lower body will become a great deal stronger and more stable. Note that if the knee and shin of the forward leg are standing perpendicular to the ground then it is hard to utilize the resisting force and the back leg won't be able to develop power in its push forward. If the knee goes past the toe, you'll lose your balance and the back leg again won't be able to develop much power. Only when you make the knee and shin slightly incline forward, with the knee not going past the toe, can you thoroughly get the full strength of two forces, pushing out and resisting, to come into play... The key to achieving whole-body coordination lies in the pushing and resisting of the two legs. Try to become aware of this in your practice”.

**DB:** I'd like to ask you about the correct method for balancing the strength expressed in the lower body. In your recent book you mentioned that the balance of oppositional forces of pushing and resisting in the stance work is an important factor in creating a stable body frame. Could you explain how this is done?

**YZD:** This is a good question. In our theory we have the requirement that the root is in the foot. This is the basis for the foundation. If the



foundation is good the upper body will be fine. If the foundation is no good, the upper body cannot be stable. Just like building a house: if the foundation work is not right, the upper structures will be unstable.

It is necessary to focus on the stability of the lower body when we practice Tai Chi Chuan

For example: If you don't have your feet shoulder width in the bow step, there's no way to be stable and it's hard to perform the motions correctly. I really think that the lower body is extremely important and the requirements should really begin with organizing the stance work. If there is something

« *If the foundation is good the upper body will be fine* »

wrong with the upper body, most probably you need to examine the lower body for the cause. If the bottom is correct, the torso and the arms will be better. Like anything, you proceed step by step: if you can't get the basics correct and then you require something of the upper body, nothing can be done if the bottom is no good, you can't coordinate. So it all starts from the foundation, this is important. Just like the way we develop as people: our personality should have fundamental qualities of fairness and compassion; these are real basics that provide for the development of the individual.

The most basic aspect of stance work is the relationship between deng and cheng (pushing and resisting). If you don't have this relationship of pushing and resisting, it's very easy for the body to go off leaning one way or another. One's equilibrium is affected and can be easily led or taken advantage of. When you practice incorrectly, you will feel it is kind of empty, it seems like the root is not solid. There is a saying,

"Rooted in the feet, developed in the legs, controlled by the waist, and manifested through the limbs." So it starts from the feet, there is an order of precedence, if you don't do it this way it's all mixed up.

**DB:** Talking specifically about the feet: When the heel goes down and the weight begins to shift, do the toes need to grab the ground and create the oppositional force?

**YZD:** When you engage your toes it's just like anything: you can't overdo it. If you have no contact from the toes it's no good, and if the toes are used too much it's not right either. Many things are like this, you have to use an appropriate amount of force. Maybe if I try too hard, there's no need for that. It's always like this: not to have is incorrect, and to be excessive is not right either. So you should use the 10 Essentials: relax and extend, not too soft or too stiff, one needs to find the balance in between.

In general you should make the essential refinements appropriately and not to an extreme. Our predecessors have formulated these principle requirements. These have helped us to avoid so many dead ends in our practice. They require us to put a great deal of effort into our study, to use practical experiences to integrate the theory into our form. Even though they are general refinements, they are very, very rich in content.


For example: the requirements for the hand. It says extend the palm and curve the fingers. This really requires an integration of stance work, torso positioning, and correct extension of the arms. This question really contains so much practical experience: when I stand the palm up, how should I do it correctly? Over the past few days I've noticed a good deal of variation in the palm positions of the students. Everybody says they are

standing the palm, but there are not too many who are doing it correctly. So we are going through a learning process. When you study the form you can't just stop and say, "I've got it now." We need to learn, become aware, gain practical experience, and then practice more and a little more. Through all these repetitions gradually one becomes more skillful. It's not sufficient to look at the Essentials and say, "It says to do this, now I've got it, I can read it and that's enough." Even though these Essentials have helped us enormously, it's not enough. The individual needs to practice and search for them, to perfect the motions.

**DB:** I'd like to focus on just one more point. The formula states, "Rooted in the feet, developed in the legs." Many students understand the importance of turning the waist but perhaps not so many are aware of developing the motion in the legs. Specifically the action of the knee: it seems that the knee needs to transfer body weight but many people hold body weight in the knee and end up injuring this area. So how can we develop the motion in the leg and protect the knee at the same time?

**YZD:** The knee has the function of connecting the upper and lower leg. Of course this joint is very essential. The formula mentions the entire leg, but just like when the arm is discussed it is actually several pieces. In the same way the knee is the essential part of the lower body structure. Its function is to connect the bottom and upper parts of the frame. If you use the knee correctly you can connect the upper and lower parts of the leg. If it is not correct, for example in the bow stance if the forward knee extends beyond the toes, the knee can't perform its function properly. You lose the function. So as with everything, there is a definite degree that is appropriate. Not





only the knees, for example if we say the waist is the commander, if you don't connect the legs correctly even though you have this commanding feature of the waist, without the proper arrangement of the structure above and below, it won't work. It can't do it by itself. Very few people pay close attention to the body arrangement principles, some don't even know that the motions requires these essential refinements, and if you don't make these changes how can the waist operate correctly? The same goes for the knees. Although they have a type of controlling force, without coordinating the upper and lower portions of the stance they can't work

Throughout the course of our training there is a kind of realization that comes with practice. For example: if you are a leader or boss at work, it's not just you. If it was just you that would be fine but the problem is there is always someone above or below you. So Tai Chi practice can give you some inspiration: I have to have managed coordination but without the bottom below me operating efficiently to help me, it won't work out. Throughout this training I need to understand that I need to be very diligent, if I do something I have to do it carefully. We emphasize that there must be ending positions for each motion sequence. Every form has a final position, so too can this be applied to our work life, the idea is the same.

**YJ:** I'd like to add a point about the legwork, specifically, where one's energy comes from during the Fajing techniques. A part of the power comes from the contracting and expanding of the leg muscles and the shifting of the body weight. Another part of the strength comes from the rotation of the waist. These combined areas produce the refined energy expressed as Jing. The root of Fajing however is in the

footwork. There are other requirements, of course, and if you use these principles correctly you can amplify the power. So "rooted in the feet, developed in the legs" is only a part of this process, how you shift the weight in a coordinated fashion is also important. So many people read, "Upper and lower combined and coordinated", but they don't quite understand how critical this requirement is. The intent of the technique and the body weight must arrive at the same time. It's not that easy. When you move, the whole body must be coordinated, only then will you be able to focus, deliver, and emit energy through one place. So the whole body works together to strengthen the emission process.

**YZD:** It is not just an isolated part of the body or the coordination of the motion; one must also harmonize the mind to be a part of this entire process.

**YJ:** If we isolate the motions and practice single applications over and over, one can experience even more clearly the need to coordinate in order to make the energy develop correctly. For example: in staff training it's very easy to see how coordinating the body will allow the energy to manifest correctly at the opposite end of the staff. If the coordinations are incorrect, the energy will be spread out and unfocused. The same applies to the sword form, if you know how to do this then the energy will travel to the tip.

**YZD:** It's very clear, whether you or I or she practices in this way. Even though we perform the same motion, there seems to be some difference. Even though we say it should all be the same, there are so many variables in the personal expression of the forms.

**DB:** Many people when they begin studying Tai Chi are so enchanted by the handwork they neglect the


stances and leg work. Hopefully this discussion will alert students that they need to pay attention to the foundation first.

**YZD:** The handwork, just look at the hand shape, not even the application of techniques, the shape of the hand is quite difficult. To get it just right, if you do it correctly then all of your strength can come out through there, the hand is where it comes out, the ultimate display of energy is in the hand. When we look at the students their hand positions are not quite clear or clean, it's hard to express the Qi correctly.

**DB:** This is a topic for another interview! Thank you both for taking the time to talk with us.

**YZD:** One more thing about the hands: It's not only the energy that is expressed, but ultimately Spirit that comes out. If you get it right, Energy, Spirit and Essence are present in the handwork. (As he was making these remarks Yang Laoshi suddenly sat upright with his eyes blazing and presented the crispest and cleanest standing palm I've ever seen him make, the transformation was startling and the energy expressed in this instant was electric.)

**DB:** I would love to talk with you at length about this topic but we have imposed too much on your time this evening.

**YZD:** I'm very happy to be able to sit here and explore these basic ideas. This is very, very good; anytime we can do it again I look forward to it. So that we can raise the level of the general group, whether concrete aspects or general theory, let's do this again. We can't just practice the form, we need to use theory to enable and enrich our practice. 



MASTER YANG ZHENDUO VERBATIM:  
**ON STUDY AND PRACTICE**

*“Tai Chi Chuan looks easy. Actually, it’s not so easy. Spend time with your study and gradually it will become easy.”*

Compiled and introduced by **Dave Barrett**

**L**earning Tai Chi Chuan is a life-long endeavor. It is not uncommon to find students in their eighties and nineties who are just as excited and engaged in their study as a beginner. Tai Chi Chuan has the unique capability to engage the intellect and enrich the physical capabilities of the student. The rewards are many: the creation of equilibrium, the achievement of tranquility, the daily experience of grace and beauty, balance and relaxation.

Over the past ten years I’ve been fortunate to study with Yang Laoshi. As I mentioned in our last issue, during each seminar I have taken comprehensive notes of his teachings. In reviewing this material I’ve collected his comments on the learning process and his encouragements and guidance for correct practice. In this article I have combined quotations from various seminars as they relate to study and practice.

Studying Tai Chi Chuan involves a good deal of memorization. First the Long Form itself, the names

and the motions and then the Ten Essential Principles must be committed to memory. Being able to focus the mind on the Principles and examine how they affect the practice is the central task of study. Another important aspect of study is observing and evaluating the performance of players more skillful than oneself. On many occasions Yang Laoshi would insist on students examining others in the class, “Watch and learn. Make comparisons. Pay attention. You can learn by doing but also learn by looking.” On our trip to China in 2002, the most exciting and enriching experience for me was to watch the men and women who were so skillful that I was inspired to study and practice all the more, that one day I might have the same achievement.

Practicing Tai Chi Chuan involves a unique interplay between the mind and the body. The physical movements are informed by the mental process and the calm, balanced motions nourish the mind. Yang Laoshi always insists

on purposive practice as opposed to automatic or mechanical repetitions. In his comments he sets forth a detailed plan for a lifetime of progressive practice. I hope that these instructions are clear. I have tried to preserve the spirit of his comments, which are sometimes brief and condensed, and at other times expansively detailed. If you have any questions about these matters please contact me and we can work together to improve our understanding of this wonderful art.

**On Study:**

“The Learning Process in Tai Chi Chuan

1. Rote imitation
2. Gaining understanding
3. Looking at differences
4. Ability to recognize improvements
5. Realizing how to change
6. Developing by increasing requirements
7. Focusing mind on progress



## 8. Never ending, no limit”

“Techniques and applications are important but beginners should focus on Principles first.”

“Achieve the requirements gradually. Plan to work day by day. One day focus on dropping the elbows, next day: footwork. There is no end to this study. Gradually skill levels improve, the eyes become sharper and one is no longer satisfied with beginning efforts. Look, compare and evaluate. As understanding improves, dissatisfaction increases. go back to the Essential Principles and re-examine your skills. Find a quiet place and achieve the requirements one at a time. Point by point gradually connect them into the whole.”

“As your study progresses and the form is memorized the mind has a tendency to wander, as if you know the forms too well. At this point you must focus on understanding the Principles as they affect each motion: generally and locally. Work part by part, then as you connect them together the mind becomes more focused, skill levels improve. One part at a time focus your mind on the particular, gradually learning control. Otherwise you’ll never learn how to link the Principles together. Practice with the Principles and you’ll become better and better. After this has been accomplished then you can focus your mind on the martial techniques and applications. At this point you imagine an opponent. Concentrating on this coordination of inner attention and external technique is an important feature of advanced practice Study from frame to frame combining the technique of the forms with the Principles of the motion. If the Principles are not applied in this way the spirit and the frames will be deficient and it will be difficult to improve. Don’t go in the wrong direction.”

“Day by day examine yourself. Year after year: every day

persevere. When you study have a long-term plan: your whole life, when will you stop, at 100? Still keep going!”

### On Practice:

“Every day you have to eat. Every day you have to practice. I wish you could practice every day, make this training a part of your life. Practice every day and you will improve. Please practice everyday! Create continuity and use your will to continue. This training will improve your body and mind: your work and your life will be better; you will have happiness and a wonderful life.”

“Form practice: Frame clear. Intent manifested. Spirit full, joints loose. Embody the essence of Yang Style. Pull the whole body together as one, sinking the joints together. Whole body feeling is connected. It is not done in one day. Practice everyday.”

“If you have the time and opportunity practice the Long Form three times in a row. First time: loosen up. Second time: comfortable. Third time: feels really powerful.”

“Try your best to remember the form and apply the Principles. Pay attention to how you execute the motions. Understand the Techniques. One posture at a time, make it clean. Feel if it is correct or what part is not correct.”

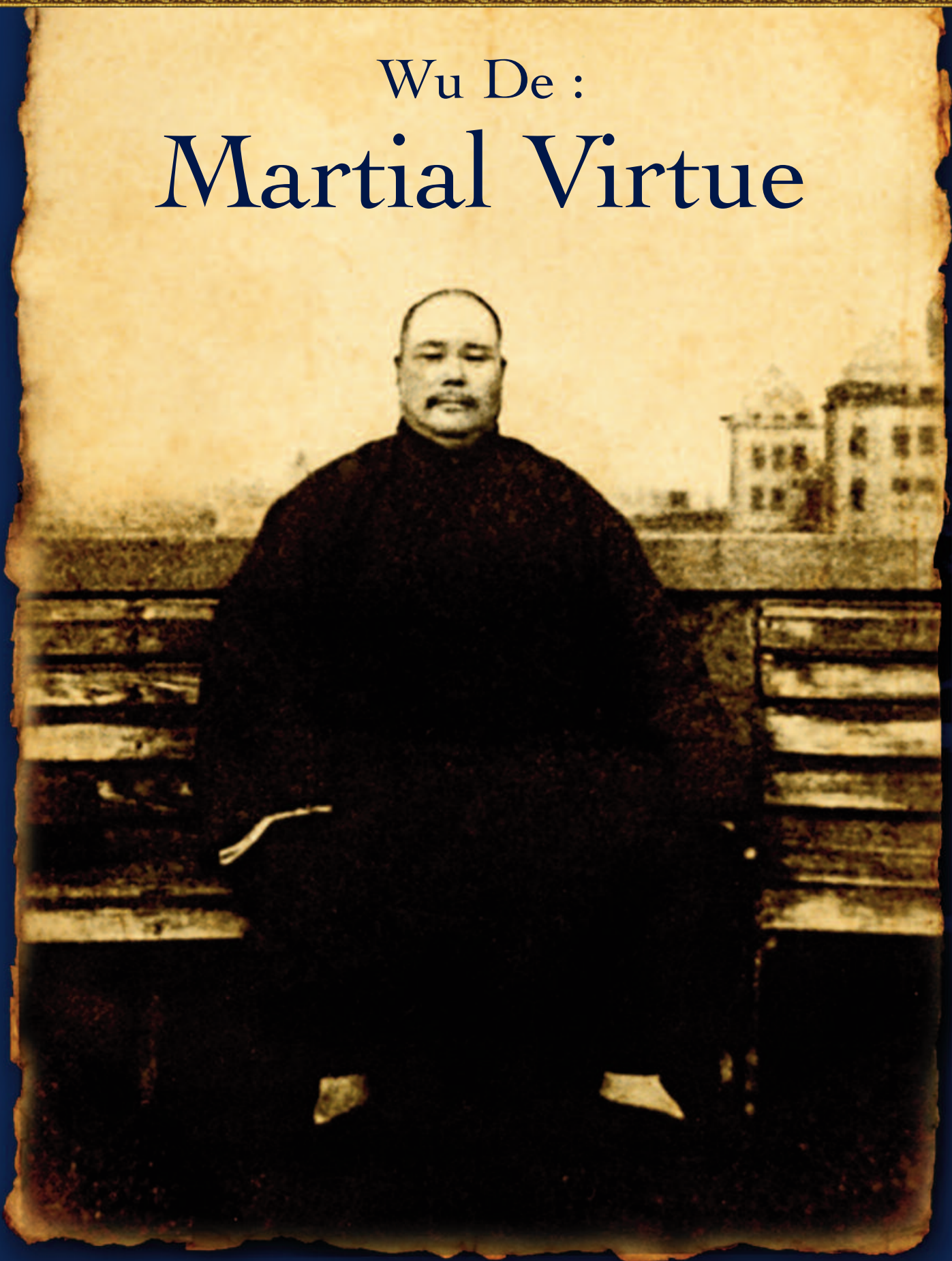
“Practice Traditional forms without alteration. Whatever the requirement is, that’s what you do. Performance must be clean and clear. Little parts influence the whole routine. Try to practice 100% perfect, it’s not easy, but possible. Try hard; make it absolutely clean and correct. Practice to improve personal character, if you start something, finish it. Start practice seriously, practice to make good habits, try to make it correct. When the forms are correct they are comfortable, when they are comfortable the power naturally comes out.”

“Control by feeling. No feeling during practice is incorrect. Improve the skills by sensing and feeling. Without set rules you will not succeed. Try to extend the internal energy throughout the whole body. In any motion you can feel it moving: rooted in the feet, developed in the legs, controlled by the waist and manifested through the shoulder, elbow, wrist to the palm and fingertips. If you don’t have the feeling it’s not right. Check yourself: is it smooth and natural, open and extended, whole body loose and moving freely? Without this the beauty of our forms will not come out. Gentle and open, we need to show this when we practice. Having no power is incorrect, power coming out naturally is correct.”

“Every technique must be clearly executed, even the smallest technique, try to imitate exactly. This is mind training, focusing and disciplining the mind. What is the Principle of mind in your body? Inside and outside coordinated. How do I feel? Does the energy flow? Can I coordinate it? Practicing without feeling makes it difficult to improve. How to understand this? If there is no understanding there is no control. Only when you understand can you feel. Yang Chengfu’s Principles are crucial for promoting feeling. How do I achieve the Principles? Do I have them in my body? These questions serve to focus the mind. Put your mind somewhere, put it in your body. Coordinate the Principles and the motions otherwise your mind will wander off and leave the body. The mind is no longer focused. Practice all of this in your intent, using mind to control the body. You can feel, you can understand, you can control.”

***“If you don’t practice, forget it!”***

Wu De :  
**Martial Virtue**







## *A Conversation with Masters Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun*

*Conducted by Dave Barrett and Translated by Jerry Karin*

**T**his past summer in Portland, Oregon during the Seminar week at Reed College, the Masters were kind enough to sit down with us for a lengthy interview after a busy day of teaching. Our conversation began by exploring the ethics and traditional cultural values within the Chinese Martial Arts generally and Tai Chi Chuan specifically. Of particular interest was how Tai Chi Chuan practice in the modern era carries these traditional ethics into the complexities of the present day. The discussion focuses briefly on models of behavior for past generations, I'd like to summarize the well established code of conduct for martial artists that has developed in China.

Martial Morality covers two main areas: the actions and the mindset of the fighter. In activity, one should express Humility, Respect, Righteousness, Trust and Loyalty. Mentally, one must have Will, Endurance, Perseverance, Patience and Courage. Prospective students were examined rigorously in all these areas and any found lacking were not initiated into the tradition. Disciples who violated these precepts were dismissed. Stories abound throughout the course of Chinese history where these virtues played a crucial role in

individual careers as well as social upheavals. These stories are still passed along through popular kung fu heroes and their movies. They form an indelible pattern in Chinese culture and are well known beyond the martial arts community.

For those interested in a detailed explanation of these traditional precepts I refer you to Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming's and Master Shou-you Liang's book: *Baguazhang* - (Emie Baghuazhang), *Theory and Applications*\*, pages 9 to 20.

\* (YMAA Publications, 1994)

I'd like to thank Jerry Karin for his brilliant simultaneous translation of the Masters' remarks. On listening to the tape during transcription I marveled at his ability to work within the flow of Master Yang's speech, so that he could express himself naturally and develop his ideas spontaneously. By sharing his unique skill with the rest of us we can all benefit from his hard work in translating difficult concepts into elegant and understandable language.

*Now that is a Virtue!*



**DB:** I'd like to ask about the moral code of Tai Chi Chuan and specific character traits that are developed through our practice. Several members have written me asking about the ranking test where it mentions a moral standard, they are curious about what this might be and where they can find out about it.

**YZD:** It's a very broad area; we can narrow the discussion to focus on morality within the martial arts traditions. Of course this should be a part of all occupations, for example in education, teachers have a duty to promote the proper social values, knowledge and physical development of their students.

As far as the martial arts are concerned, there is an innate quality of character required, a common standard of behavior. In the past you had to respect your teacher and the teacher as well had a responsibility to respect and care for the students. If we broaden our view this means the younger generation should respect the elders and the elders have a responsibility to look out for the youngsters.

In feudal times you had to be loyal to the person above you. This was a fundamental element of traditional society and of course there were many other aspects of this. To benefit oneself by harming others is not acceptable. For example, in the past if you had students that you adopted as your disciples, they would not be allowed to perform criminal activities. In the martial traditions one was expected to do righteous acts to benefit others. Just because one was skillful in the martial arts did not mean that they could do whatever they wanted to do. One should be loyal and truthful.

**YJ:** This means that if one is stronger and more skillful than others, they should not take advantage of the weaker person.

**YZD:** Back in feudal society they used to talk about values in their family: loyalties to parents, care for children, and respect for spouses. In the martial traditions when we salute we have to cover the fist with an open palm as a gesture of humility and restraint. This is the main idea: not to act aggressively and take advantage of one's skills to do bad things.

One should have character, to be fair and straight. As they used to say this is the distinction between a gentleman and a petty man. Respect and tolerance are crucial; one should not take advantage of a group because they are smaller and weaker. These are the general ideas.

**DB:** In terms of personal development, personal character traits, how does Tai Chi Chuan help to develop the individual?

**YZD:** Nowadays our practice is not only martial, it has developed into a multi-purpose discipline but the traditional virtues still apply: be humble, honor the elders take care of the youngsters, do not take advantage of the weak. Even though one's skills may be very advanced, do not be prideful. However good you are there is probably someone better, and someone even better than that. You need to be humble.

**YJ:** There is a traditional saying: For every strong one there is one even stronger, for every tall mountain peak there is an even taller one beyond it.

**YZD:** These points developed out of a fighting tradition, in the larger social context it is sometimes difficult to avoid conflicts. But Tai Chi Chuan has changed. The moves are gently expressed, slowed down, not the fierce fighting styles of the past.

This practice is slow, gentle and even. This can help give you a more coordinated and smooth existence and environment. It can tame your nature. With some people, their minds are hyperactive and agitated. Our practice allows them to slowly relax their thinking. This is a definite aid for personal cultivation.

**YJ:** Especially important is our principle that within the movement you seek quiescence. This is a trend that can affect your life in general. If you are not struggling or competing there is very little that can disturb you.

**YZD:** This is a very nice thing in general. It is really a benefit for people's health and the health of the society at large. If we have the common goal of staying calm and centered and there is a matter of argument we can resolve it peacefully among ourselves without splitting into competing factions. We can get along in a coordinated fashion but so often social matters fall into argument and division, this has a negative effect socially. So it's important that the individual cultivate calm and equilibrium. In Tai Chi Chuan practice we address both the mind and the body so we often say that our practice can cause both to be healthy. In this way we can all respect each other and cooperate without any incidents. Otherwise there is struggle and division. This is the main idea: personal cultivation can positively affect the larger social dynamic.

**DB:** For the Tai Chi Chuan student, what particular qualities are necessary: Patience, perseverance, attention to detail? It seems these are elementary ingredients for success in practice.

**YZD:** You should have these conditions whether it be in Tai Chi Chuan or anything. When you do something you have to follow through and do it thoroughly. Don't do something in a half attentive way. This is true of any endeavor. For example, in our Shanxi Provincial Tai Chi Chuan Association there are many different practice groups some small and others quite large. They are like a big family. Everybody is concerned about each other, helping each other. If someone's family has a problem whether it is a difficulty or a happy thing like a wedding, the word gets out and the group pulls together to help. If there's work to be done, people show up to help. One of the members may be quite



sick, so people take up a collection and go over to care for this person. This has happened many times in our Association. So if something big happens like the loss of a parent, the first thing members will do is come to the group and share with them and get support. They get along like a family. This is all through the larger group dynamic of Tai Chi Chuan practice. Everybody should help each other. If there is a problem we should go and help. This is a good result of practicing together. We train physically but we also train mentally and this affects our relationships.

In the old days among the high level martial arts, not just bare hand also any kind of fighter, there were important conditions for the disciple to follow: not to steal or to force oneself in a sexual situation. One had to be careful not to teach such individuals. These were traditional precepts; today we focus on creating calm and even behavior in the individual. It is often said that when people begin to study Tai Chi Chuan they care more about others. Through this activity they can calm themselves and train their character. This can be a good influence in peoples' lives.

**DB:** This seems to be a unique feature of Tai Chi Chuan. There are many other sports but so many of them are competitive. In Tai Chi Chuan practice not only is there personal development but it also benefits a group approach to problem solving.

**YZD:** It shouldn't be competitive, it's not only Yang Style, there are many other styles of Tai Chi Chuan. But if we focus on Yang Style, even within this style there are many differences there too. We are working toward the health of the people. We shouldn't criticize other stylists, saying, "Ours is the only true way, yours is no good." We shouldn't do this. In practicing Tai Chi Chuan, if there is some difficulty or question we should get together and discuss it. We should strive for unity.

Somebody asked me about the Simplified 24 Move Tai Chi Chuan

form, is that bad? Is ours better? I don't see it that way. I feel that the Simplified form can promote Tai Chi Chuan effectively, and because of the government's support of this form, Tai Chi Chuan has become more popular. This is a good phenomenon for us who practice Traditional Yang Family Style. It's not a bad thing. Of course there are some exceptions, it's hard to be absolute about this, generally they are the same. Some areas of the forms are slightly different, that's hard to avoid. I still think there is consistency with our Traditional Style and no serious contradictions. We can't say, "That's just wrong, mine is better." Of course, the Traditional Style has its own special qualities. The world is a big place. Everybody has their own enthusiasms. For example, in Europe the food is different, even in China in the North they like salty and in the South sweet. This is not the same. So of course in doing Tai Chi Chuan there will be many different styles. That's good, people have more of a choice, not only one kind. The goal is still the same: to improve the health of everyone.

Now as far as which to study, that is up to the individual's preference. Just because I like to eat hot peppers, someone else is bad for not eating them? That's ludicrous! Some like vinegar and some don't but you can't say vinegar is bad; I may like vinegar and you don't. Some like Chen or Sun Style Tai Chi Chuan, everyone has their particular tastes and even more so one should not criticize on this basis. So if someone develops an effective method and popularizes it, there is a positive benefit. If the method was no good it would have disappeared, its existence indicates its benefit. Let them do it. This is how I feel about it.

**DB:** If I could summarize our discussion: Tai Chi Chuan has a positive effect on the personal level and in the community as well, but what Yang Laoshi was just talking about was a wider political awareness of tolerance, equanimity and cooperation. If I could ask one


last question: In your experience, what are the character traits a Tai Chi Chuan teacher needs to be successful?

**YZD:** First, you have to establish your own skills through study and practice. If you want to be a teacher you have to be a model. If you are demanding something of others you must first demand it of yourself. Only then will the others learn correctly. If you're not square with yourself, the others won't be either. Find in yourself the traditional virtues of Respect and Humility.

The Chinese concept of teacher and disciple may be slightly different than that in the West. They used to say that the relationship was like that of father and a son. So this is a very intimate kind of relationship in some ways.

**YJ:** Many of the rules of behavior and points of etiquette we have been discussing go back over three thousand years and are drawn from a variety of traditional sources such as Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Mencius and Confucius. These form a backdrop for Chinese culture. The current moral climate in China has changed a bit from more traditional models. In the past, when one wanted to study martial arts you were asked, "What is your purpose in training?" The first answer would be to strengthen the body and the second would be to develop a benevolent morality. There is a long tradition of martial heroes who used their skills righteously for the benefit of the people.

Nowadays it's difficult to only use the Chinese moral compass. All of Chinese martial arts have become internationalized. To sum it all up the idea is that one should do good things. It's hard to talk about many of the details because of cultural differences.

**DB:** I would like to thank the both of you. Perhaps these virtues of martial practice are well known in China, for many of our international friends this conversation will be very interesting. 

武德



By Dave Barrett  
Association Journal Editor



# The Tao of Learning

## *A Conversation with*

Following Tai Chi theory, the process of learning and storing techniques

Yang Chengfu's book refers to this Yin/Yang process: your body

Tai Chi Chuan is not just learning the form, this is only half

This is the Tao of learning

**DB:** *I want to begin our discussion about learning Tai Chi by asking you about the importance of ethics and respect in the study process.*

**YJ:** In China we have a saying that "de" or morals come first. Respect is earned not from your technical skills but from moral bearing. For example, Yang Chengfu's techniques were good, but his success was based on his character. He was gentle and centered and gained many followers because of this. My grandfather is widely respected also for his ethics and how he treats other martial arts practitioners.

**DB:** *If we turn this around, this is a quality that the student needs to have as well?*

**YJ:** Sure, I want people who study Tai Chi Chuan not just to focus on learning the techniques. First you need to have a stable and centered mind and an even personality. We haven't talked too much about this because when I first began teaching I didn't understand Western culture very well. I didn't want to force people to study by the Chinese methods.

**DB:** *Let's make sure people understand that this is a special quality of personality: you need to be even tempered, patient and kind. Are there any other aspects to this that will help students succeed?*

**YJ:** Yes, actually in China we talk about the Tao. How would you translate this?

**DB:** *Tao means the way, the way of nature.*

**YJ:** Everything has a Tao, cooking has cooking Tao, business has business Tao. We have the Tao of martial arts. Our family respects all martial artists for their time and hard work developing their skills. We respect different Tai Chi styles and families in this way. This is a simple example. I don't want to force Oriental culture onto the Western people, but gradually people should understand what is the Tao of the martial arts, not only learning the techniques but we say that your skill level is not just technical, but how well you understand this Tao.

**DB:** *This is an important element in long term study success and the attitude of the student should reflect this understanding?*

**YJ:** You know, actually I'm thinking we should talk to the beginning students about these elements of respect, for example when we begin class with the salute, it shows this kind of spirit. We can start from that point and gradually introduce these cultural elements.

**DB:** *Let's talk about the Tao of study, of learning. For beginners, the time that it takes to bring a beginner along, how do we help them work through the confusion of the*





# g Tai Chi Chuan

## h Master Yang Jun

es is Yin, to bring them alive through the push hands process is Yang.

y stores the techniques and push hands activates their living use.

lf, the good Tai Chi player always combines Yin and Yang.

arning Tai Chi Chuan.



*memorization process. How in the Tao of learning do we solve this problem of memorization?*

**YJ:** This is actually a big problem for modern people, how they study. Compared to the traditional process, it seems that everyone is very rushed; one part of the rush can be from yourself, one part can come from the teacher as well.

**DB:** *Does the modern student want too much, too fast?*

**YJ:** This is one reason. In the traditional process, the first years they generally don't teach you very much. You work with classmates on basic training but during this time you hear a lot, you see a lot so that when you get past the basics, you are not surprised by what's new. It's very gradual.

**DB:** *The teaching model we have here in the West is lesson by lesson, step by step.*

**YJ:** Not only that, in today's life here, we study in class and then everybody separates, then you have no helpers during your own practice. In China before and after class people take time to help each other. The way life is here, it's difficult to change. Maybe slowing down a little bit, taking more time to work together can help some people. Times have changed and our teaching methods need to change as well. If you want to keep growing you have to change. When I teach it's not always a fixed program, like

a machine. You have to follow the students, how much can they take, and what are they interested in.

**DB:** *Should we require that students have memorized sequences and can do them before introducing new motions?*

**YJ:** No, I don't want to say that because that would be too strict for them, it may be that they feel they could never learn it. Of course we need to require proficiency, but each class you need to keep interesting. If you do the same thing over and over, people will lose interest before they can get any benefit from Tai Chi Chuan. This may be a reason students get halfway and then disappear.

**DB:** *I want to ask you about this because it seems many begin Tai Chi study but very few follow through. Is this because the form is long and difficult to learn?*

**YJ:** It's because the classes are not interesting.

**DB:** *Let's talk about how to keep the beginners interested. When I studied in Hong Kong my teacher there said that new motions need to be done at least a dozen times before they begin to sink in. They need to be repeated over and over. In your experience learning and teaching in China is this how it is done? Is this how the student gains confidence, through constant repetition?*



« The same movements, each time talk a little bit differently, to make them do the same thing but with new feeling. »

**YJ:** I will say that Tai Chi Chuan has very deep theoretical support. The movements themselves, whenever you do something over and over, can become boring. It doesn't matter who is studying, this happens to me too! The point is you have to understand from the inside to discover new things. It's not just making the motions standard and beautiful. Everybody is different: some learn fast, some slow. I believe if you only do the movements, only focusing on corrections the students become discouraged. They feel they can never get it right.

**DB:** Too many corrections and repetitions can be a problem.

**YJ:** That's right.

**DB:** How do we keep the beginners moving forward, by adding meaning to the motions?

**YJ:** Yes.

**DB:** What particular meaning is important for beginners?

**YJ:** The biggest problem for beginners is their foundation.

**DB:** Physical foundation, footwork, stance work?

**YJ:** That's right. You need to train this foundation without making it boring. As you are doing this you should be telling them what they should feel. Let them discover what the inside feeling is. The same movements, each time talk a little bit differently, to make them do the same thing but with new feeling.

**DB:** So you build a foundation and then you add layers of meaning on top of that, so that the repetition is not mechanical.

**YJ:** That's right, then when they are working on the foundation at the same time they are learning the theoretical basis, this keeps them interested. Just correcting arm or shoulder positions for example will not hold people's interest.

**DB:** Corrections need to be given carefully, not always in the negative, "don't do this" and what I enjoy about you and your grandfather's method is that often you will say, "Try it like this". The beginner needs to be convinced that they can learn it.

**YJ:** Every teacher needs to be sensitive to their students; from their faces you can tell if they are interested.

**DB:** How do you keep students interested?

**YJ:** If people are bored with the movements, I talk about theory. From one corrected mistake I tell them why you don't want to do this. By adding this information, we can expand to include other motions where this mistake can cause problems. You know, I don't do many corrections with new students, unless they have worked with me for some time before, generally I don't touch them.

**DB:** Why not?

**YJ:** Some people like hands on, some don't. Before you really know them, some people are shy. This is natural.

**DB:** Let me summarize this part of our discussion about beginners: The teacher needs to be gentle and students need to be patient. When the beginner becomes discouraged, confused and feels like dropping out, what can we do to help them follow through?

**YJ:** Everyone has their own personality. We can't expect everyone to stay with it if they decide this exercise is not for them, you can't pull them back. For those who are undecided, you need to encourage them. How? Actually it is by engaging their mind. Explain clearly what type of Tai Chi Chuan they are learning and the benefits of practice. Tai Chi Chuan is very interesting from a philosophical point of view and the theory is linked to this. You can never finish talking about this. So not just the motions, but what they feel from the inside.

**DB:** How long does this beginning process last? According to the Progression of Practice chart we see a 2 to 3 year period. Some people may feel that after 8 months to a year they should be finished. Why should we spend more time at the beginning level?

**YJ:** We need more time because generally the people I see in class do not practice enough.

**DB:** What is enough practice?

**YJ:** Yang Chengfu said it very clearly: every day 7 times practice. We don't have that much time but if people can put a half hour to an hour in, that would be good. The feeling comes from your daily practice, you have the time, and you have the motions. If you don't work like this the motions are not familiar enough then you cannot have the feeling.

**DB:** Let's define feeling, what do you mean by feeling?

**YJ:** Different levels have different feelings.

**DB:** How about the beginning level?

**YJ:** Beginning level you don't have anything actually, you are busy with the movements and trying to coordinate these with the principles. Even doing this it may not be Tai Chi Chuan just yet, only exercise motions.

**DB:** What is the Tao of Tai Chi feeling?

**YJ:** These feelings generally start in the second year of practice, of course every school can be different. At my school we take a year to finish the form, sometimes a year and half.

**DB:** After a year and half, what do you mean by the feeling that leads the student to progress?

**YJ:** After this time we are not just focused on the movements but on how to go from external into internal, which means you should feel gradually how the Yin/Yang changes take place: from back to forward, left to right, not just externally but with the internal moving together. This takes time. Actually your whole life! At the beginning your motions may be square or angular and tense, gradually, gradually becoming more soft and fluid.



**DB:** After two years the feeling should be of softening, becoming more rounded, more relaxed and fluid?

**YJ:** Everybody at the beginning is too stiff and tense, you may think that you're not but look around, we all have this problem. It's like you have rough corners and you take sandpaper and gradually, gradually round and smooth them out. Takes time. The more you do it, the more you feel it, the more you feel it, the more interest you have.

**DB:** For me this is the most fascinating thing about long term Tai Chi study. The more you feel relaxed and fluid, the more that you want to practice.

**YJ:** That's right! Every day you have new feelings.

**DB:** Let's talk about what you are looking for in the 4 to 7 year student, the detailed practice section on the chart.

**YJ:** After you experience these feelings and practice daily they stay with you. You need to understand energy and how it works. You need to know that relaxing unifies the body's energy, especially when you do push hands. If you don't relax, if you can't forget yourself, if you concentrate too much on how you do the motions then you yourself are tight. At this point these new techniques of practice, especially push hands can help you by testing your feeling.

**DB:** In the Tao of learning Tai Chi at a certain point do we need to have contact with a partner?

**YJ:** In learning Tai Chi we have two processes one is the acquisition of technical skills and the other is actually using them, to make them alive.

**DB:** How do you make the techniques come to life?

**YJ:** Following Tai Chi theory, the process of learning and storing techniques is Yin, to bring them alive through the push hands process is Yang. Yang Chengfu's book refers to this Yin/Yang process: your body stores the techniques and push hands activates their living use. Tai Chi Chuan is not just learning the form, this is only half, the good Tai Chi player always combines Yin and Yang. This is the Tao of learning Tai Chi Chuan. Finally we need to balance ourselves within this process. This is for those people who wish to deeply understand Tai Chi Chuan. For most people who are just interested in Tai Chi Chuan as a health exercise, we don't make this a requirement.

**DB:** Do you think those who practice for health can benefit from push hands practice?

**YJ:** Oh yes. It's all about Yin and Yang like I said: Yin stores the techniques, Yang will test whether these work or not. When you experience the Yang this can help the Yin, your techniques have more meaning. So this is like Yin/Yang helping each other.

**DB:** Combining these elements together, I've noticed that some of my students when I have a chance to practice push hands with them; their form practice improves as well.

**YJ:** Not only their movements, but how they understand their energy.

**DB:** Exactly, it's their quality of energy that changes when they return to form practice.

**YJ:** You cannot use words to describe Tai Chi Chuan's energy. If you say, "too hard", well what's "too hard"? "Too soft"? Sometimes you can not use language to make them understand.

**DB:** They have to learn by touch.

**YJ:** However not everyone wants to be touched. You have to respect that. From my point of view, I learned a lot from push hands. This helped me immensely to understand how the theories of Tai Chi Chuan can work in real time. Try it, after you try you find what works better, then you put this into your daily hand form practice. Actually, this helped my development a great deal.

**DB:** Every Tai Chi student feels at times that they are stuck, they are not improving. Once they reach a certain level they can't get beyond that. Did this happen to you?

**YJ:** Yes this happens to everyone, I think. Any study is like this; calligraphy for example, sometimes it seems you never get any better. In China we have a saying about after each peak there is a valley, but if you keep going you'll reach the next peak.

**DB:** Could you give us an example of when you might have been stuck in a valley? How did you get up to the next peak?

**YJ:** This happened to me many times. For example, when you just practice forms you may not feel stuck; you have confidence in your practice. You're comfortable.

**DB:** Sometimes you don't even know that you are stuck? What happens then?

**YJ:** It's when you push hands and find that others can always control you, then you feel your defects. At one time there were some people who could always control me, I couldn't do anything.

**DB:** How did you get through that?

**YJ:** It's tough. I had no balance of technique and feeling. I couldn't get past that.

**DB:** Did you change your body position, or your mind? Was there some certain key?

**YJ:** Actually Tai Chi Chuan is not about movements, it's about energy. We don't fight with the opponent's posture, we fight with their energy. If you just focus on posture that's the reason you always get stuck. One point is you need a teacher to guide you; the other is that you need to think by yourself. After I studied push hands for 3 or 4 years it seemed like anyone could beat me.

**DB:** That seems hard to believe now.

**YJ:** It drove me crazy, everybody was better than me. That really discouraged me when I was 16 or 17, it was frustrating.

**DB:** Do you remember when it changed?

« Tai Chi  
Chuan is not  
just learning  
the form, this  
is only half,  
the good  
Tai Chi player  
always  
combines Yin  
and Yang »





« The principles, the motions and the energy all need to work together. »

**YJ:** Not long after that, maybe another year. My personality is such that I like thinking about problems, looking for solutions, I tried to understand why I could not succeed.

**DB:** What was it?

**YJ:** I can't get very detailed here but basically it was that I was focusing on the wrong points, like most people if I can't do it I was looking at my motions, what should I do with the movements? Actually that is not yet the real understanding. The real thing is to understand the energy.

**DB:** So for students in the middle years of their practice this could be an important point: that the physical position is not as important as the energy feeling?

**YJ:** I will not agree with that, the movements are always important.

**DB:** Well let me ask that if someone is stuck in the valley they should use both sides: the physical posture and the energy feeling? How do they do this?

**YJ:** The principles, the motions and the energy all need to work together. For example in push hands, they may be using the wrong type of energy because they don't understand the opponent. This is a very general answer, it can get very detailed. Every opponent is different. Is the energy for that particular situation correct or not?

**DB:** I'd like to ask about the feeling of correct energy usage in the hand form. Should we use the "rooted in the feet, developed in the legs, controlled by the waist, issued from the back" model for using our own energy?

**YJ:** Yes, you should feel that. Also you can test those kinds of feelings in push hands.

**DB:** When we talk about this continuous flow of energy from the feet to the extremities, how can we help people understand?

**YJ:** I think first the teacher needs to understand. I know many of our teachers in their own practice are not quite clear yet on this point. Often they are forcing the energy. Could you do the bow stance?

**DB:** Right now?

*(At this point Yang Laoshi asked me to stand up and perform a simple weight shift in the bow stance from back to forward. Feeling a bit like the proverbial lamb being led to the slaughter, I did a very ordinary bow stance and moved my weight forward. Gently but firmly he offered the following critique. Then he stood up and when he shifted forward you could almost see the energy pouring from his back leg into the front and a very fluid back pressure from the front leg supporting his motion. Then he did a series of Fajin (explosive energy) releases in the fixed step, sinking and rooting instantly as the energy released outwards almost like he was sitting down on a chair. The transformation from fluid to explosive energy was like a lightning strike!)*

**YJ:** Yes, how do you make the bow stance? How do you root it? Make a step, go. Actually this kind of rooting, I feel you're not really rooting.

**DB:** How come?

**YJ:** Too stiff, not relaxed enough. We need to push from the back and support from the front. This is the basic method. But how do we use this push and support? Actually, a lot of people do this with stiff energy and you end up neutralizing your forward motion. In this case you are using the supporting energy from the front leg against yourself. This is not natural motion. You have to transfer your weight more smoothly, using a fluid transport of energy. When you explode the energy you can see it's like sitting here, that's when we have rooting. So how can the students understand this? You can't just say, "push and support, push and support", you need to get this feeling from push hands and then bring this back to your hand from practice. Relax, use it naturally.

**DB:** I'd like to ask you how the weapons practice is a part of the Tao of learning Tai Chi.

**YJ:** Actually after you learn push hands I'd say that the weapons are just a part of the body. You use the same relaxation, same natural motion.

**DB:** What is the correct sequence for traditional study? Do we learn hand form, push hands and then the weapons?

**YJ:** Yes, actually the most important two parts are hand form and push hands.

**DB:** You would recommend that we begin push hands before we start the weapons forms?

**YJ:** That's the traditional way. From studying these two methods you have more understanding of Tai Chi Chuan. Learning weapons if you don't understand energy, it's just external motion. However people have different goals, for example, creating beautiful motions with the weapons. We can't make it a rule that they study push hands. Today's Tai Chi Chuan is not just focused on the martial arts elements. It's used in many ways for many purposes. It depends on your interest.

**DB:** Can the weapons be used as a tool to extend the energy correctly?

**YJ:** I don't really want people to practice weapons with each other. It's dangerous but yes, you can stick, adhere, connect and follow with the weapons the same as in push hands. The only difference is that the weapons have specific techniques such as thrusting, lifting, etc. The energy is the same as what you learn from the postures of the hand form and the energy research in push hands.

**DB:** We've talked about the beginning levels, then the detailed practice of adding push hands and weapons forms over a number of years, what I'd like to ask about is the process of refining this knowledge, it can last your whole life?

**YJ:** Yes, once you get into the refinement practice probably you will be interested in Tai Chi Chuan for your whole life!



**DB:** *Some students are 15 or 20 years into study, I myself have been practicing for 30 years. There are a whole set of different issues that come up. For example, the practice can become too automatic, or I may be satisfied with my study, and stop developing my skills. I may figure that after 30 years I must know Tai Chi Chuan by now. What suggestions do you have in this situation to continue the Tao of learning Tai Chi Chuan?*

**YJ:** Tai Chi Chuan is something that you continuously study, it's never finished. I will say that half of your study is from your teacher, the other half is by yourself. You have daily practice feeling and you have to focus on the theoretical foundation. Do you practice automatically or can you feel your Qi flowing through your whole body? Is your body full of Qi? Do you feel it moving inside your body like a wave as Yin and Yang are changing? Every motion has two parts: storing energy and releasing energy. Do you feel clearly the Yin/Yang changes with each motion at all times? When you have this kind of wave feeling, some waves are small, some big, then you clearly feel the gathering and releasing Qi process. Finally we say you want to feel that the whole body is full of Qi.

**DB:** *When we talk about gathering or storing of energy sensations is it useful to think of sending the energy to one part of the body like the Dantian?*

**YJ:** I don't want you to focus on just one point but it is connected to the Dantian. When we talk about Fajin energy there are external and internal aspects. Tai Chi Chuan is always like that. For example externally is the body coordinated? Internally the feeling is like inhale and exhale; we have to use the breath correctly. The Qi is connected to what organ? The lungs and how you use the lungs will affect the motion of Qi. When we use Fajin we are sending the Qi to the part of the body that delivers this energy. You want to send the energy to the palm? How do you do this? The Qi must sink to the Dantian and not only is it stored there but it connects with the pre-natal Qi. They affect each other. You need the right method, to get the correct energy.

**DB:** *When you practice what do you concentrate on? Is it this gathering and extending of energy through the body?*

**YJ:** At a certain time I did, but not now. This energy process for me now is naturally automatic.

**DB:** *So what are you focusing on now?*

**YJ:** I'm not focusing on anything. My mind is calm. I enjoy the comfort of the motions.

**DB:** *This is a very important point because the long term student can get distracted by technical details then their mind becomes tight and the natural feelings are elusive. Are we seeking an open, calm and peaceful feeling in our practice?*

**YJ:** Yes that's what we want. Finally what we learn is the spirit of Tai Chi Chuan, not just the motions and the techniques. That's not only what we want. From daily practice we constantly smooth out the motions and you don't need to think. At the beginning of course you must consider techniques and energy motions in the body. After

daily, daily practice do you just focus on these? When you do push hands, are you thinking when you push the opponent what kind of breathing? You don't.

**DB:** *So we want to be completely natural?*

**YJ:** That's right!

**DB:** *When we go to China and I watch the Senior players, some of whom have been practicing for 50 years, ladies and gentlemen in their 70's and 80's, their motions are so natural, their quality of energy is so smooth. How do they do this? In terms of developing a natural quality of mind, body and motion is this a spiritual thing?*

**YJ:** The spirit should be completely natural, that's the final result. The reason Tai Chi Chuan has so many different styles (actually anyone can create a style) it's because the way they practice is comfortable and natural for them. Finally after we learn the movements and make them natural, we forget the movements, this is the study process. You must be completely joined with Tai Chi Chuan, you don't have anything external, it all belongs to you.

**DB:** *Do you have this feeling?*

**YJ:** Yes I do.

**DB:** *What does it feel like?*

**YJ:** Natural, I don't care which kind of motion I'm doing. I do the standard forms but I can do them many different ways as well, they are all comfortable. I don't care about specific sequences anymore.

**DB:** *Did anybody tell you how to do this?*

**YJ:** It comes from yourself. The teacher can show patterns, how to join with the opponent, how to make the energy correct. After you learn the patterns, who cares about what specific circles you do?

**DB:** *How do we achieve this totally natural, spontaneous practice?*

**YJ:** There are two parts, one is mental the other physical just like all of Tai Chi Chuan. Physically refined energy is not stiff or forced. Mentally from push hands experience, you realize that stiffness cannot help you; the opponent's energy can get into your body. Mind is correct then the energy will be correct. Finally when you get into the natural way, my grandfather always says, Tai Chi Chuan looks like nothing.

**DB:** *What do you mean?*

**YJ:** No movement, no shape, only go with the energy. You don't care what form, what movements. Often when I demonstrate and I only have 5 minutes I don't care. 5 minutes, OK! I create my own form, I don't care. People ask me what form was that, I don't know, I don't remember but in that moment my motions are spontaneous. I follow the standards of course, but I don't care what comes next. We want to be as natural as possible. After you learn everything, try to make yourself natural.

**DB:** *Thank you so much for this fascinating conversation!* ☺

*« Mind is correct  
then the energy  
will be correct.  
Finally when you  
get into the  
natural way,  
my grandfather  
always says,  
Tai Chi Chuan  
looks like  
nothing. »*



# 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.

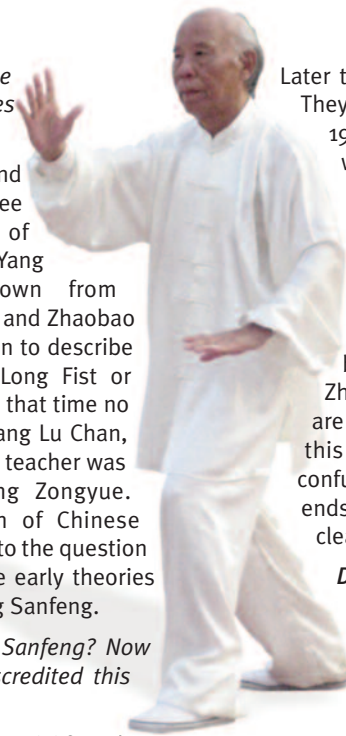
**WW:** Around 1910 a scholar named Guan Baiyi found a chapter in a book which reported that someone named Wang Zong taught internal martial arts in Shaanxi during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Guan Baiyi supposed that this Wang Zong was the same person as Wang Zongyue. But the problem here is that Wang 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.* 

# T h e B A L A N C E o f N A T U R E

## Basic Principles and Features of Taiji Quan

By Lu Shengli

English translation by Zhang Yun

The central principle of Taiji Quan derives from one of the most fundamental concepts in traditional Chinese culture. The concept first appeared in *Yi Jing (I Ching)*, the book written about 1000 BC that delineates the laws of universal change; the *yi* in the title means “changing”. A famous line in *Yi Jing* asserts, “There is *Taiji* in *yi*, the laws of change, and *liangyi* is generated from it. *Liangyi*, in turn, generates *sixiang* and *sixiang* generates *Bagua*.” Also stated is the principle that “one *yin* and one *yang* united comprise Dao.” Here the term Dao is synonymous with *Taiji*.

*Yi Jing* played a central role in the development of Chinese philosophy. Its profound ideas were seized upon by such renowned thinkers as Kongzi (Confucius) who formulated Confucianism, and Laozi, who originated the tenets of Daoism. The influence of *Yi Jing* has permeated every aspect of traditional Chinese culture.

Laozi, for example, said that *wuji*, meaning the “state of nothingness or non-being,” is the beginning state of the universe; and that *you* or *Taiji*, which means “having” or “being”, is the mother of all things. He posited that everything in the universe is generated from *you*, and that *you* is generated from *wu*. “I do not know the name for the mother of all things,” he said, “so I just call it Dao.” “All things,” he declared, “convey *yin* and hold *yang*.”

In the millennium that followed the founding of Daoism by Laozi, the *Taiji* principle was further refined, eventually reaching maturity with the contributions of Chen Tuan and successive generations of his students. Chen Tuan (?-989), a famous scholar and Daoist priest, devoted his life to the study and research of *Yi Jing*, the philosophies of Laozi, and the health practices

of *qigong*. His thinking may also have pre-figured the martial arts, and the followers of some styles claim him as their founder. The diagram of *Taiji* has been purported either to have been invented by him or to have been passed down by him. Many of his writings had a profound influence on Chinese culture. His article “Xian Tian Tu” or “The Pre-birth Diagram” included a depiction of the basic *qigong* practice principle.

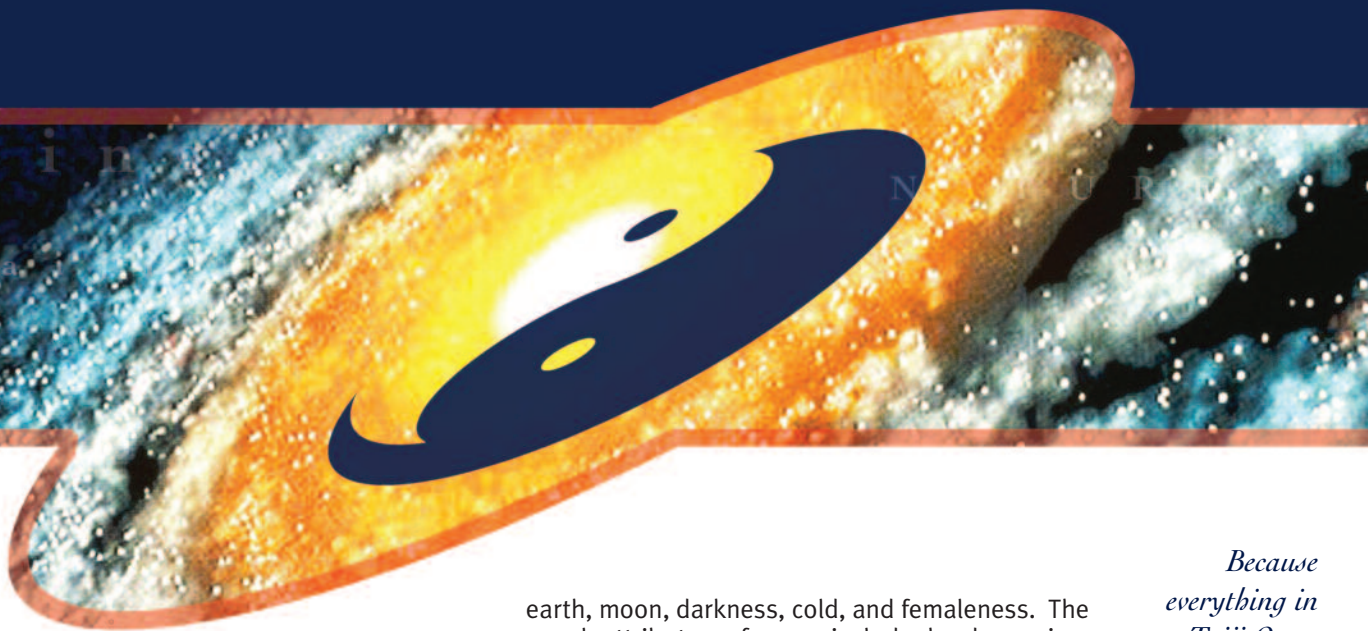
In accordance with Chen’s central ideas, the famous scholar Zhou Dunyi, Chen’s third-generation disciple, wrote a famous article called “Taiji Tu Shuo” or “The Explanation of the *Taiji* Diagram,” in which the *Taiji* principle as we know it today is described systematically and completely. This work includes the *Taiji* diagram first presented by Chen Tuan but explicates the illustration differently. Later, the famous Song Dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi provided annotations and explanations for Zhou’s article. Together these writings elucidated the standard definition of the *Taiji* principle and formed the foundation of the Daoist worldview.

Taiji Quan is based on the *taiji* principle that expresses the traditional Chinese view of the origin of the universe. *Tai* means “immense” or “great”; *ji* means “extreme” or “limit.” The term “*Taiji*” thus describes a great principle that applies to everything. In traditional Chinese culture, *Taiji* is the same as Dao; both refer to the basic, all-encompassing natural law of the universe. All things must be in harmony with Dao in order to prosper or function well. The *taiji* principle is expressed in all aspects of traditional Chinese culture.

According to the *taiji* concept, the world started from *wuji*, a state of nothingness or non-being, or a homogeneous

*It is very  
important to keep  
the taiji principle  
in mind at all times  
while training  
and to apply it  
devotedly  
in practice.  
If an action does  
not obey the taiji  
principle, then it is  
not a Taiji Quan  
skill.*





mixture of all things sometimes likened to a cloud. *Wuji* describes the universe in its most primal form, before there was any differentiation of matter. When the universe began to emerge from the *wuji* state, *yin qi* (yin energy) and *yang qi* (yang energy) were created and became differentiated. The *yang qi*, which was light in weight, rose up to form the sky; and the *yin qi*, which was heavy, sank down to form the earth. With the differentiation of *yin* and *yang*, the life of the universe started from this new state called *taiji*. *Taiji* state is source of all things, so sometimes people like to say *taiji* is the mother of all things. The *taiji* principle became the most important concept in ancient Chinese cosmology.

In the *taiji* state, *yin* and *yang* do not exist as separate entities. Although they can be conceptually distinguished, each contains the other and cannot be considered alone. In the next emergent state called *liangyi* or the “two appearances,” *yin* and *yang* become distinct and separate entities. Each can be independently considered in terms of its unique qualities. *Liangyi* gives rise to the state of *sixiang* or the “four shapes”; and *sixiang*, in turn, generates *Bagua* or the “eight trigrams.” The eight trigrams can be combined to form sixty-four *gua* or hexagrams, and in this manner the universe evolves from the simplest beginning to a complex of myriad forms. Everything is created from the emergence and changing energies of *yin* and *yang*. This is the key principle of *taiji*.

In traditional Chinese philosophy, *yin* and *yang* describe opposing qualities or concepts, but these qualities also support each other. Each exists because the other exists; the existence of one necessarily implies the existence of the other. *Yin* and *yang* complement each other, and each is capable of changing its state and emerging as the other. Although used as abstract concepts, *yin* and *yang* can also be applied to the description of concrete objects.

The usual attributes of *yin* include soft, quiet, passive, obedient, receptive, restorative, substantial, internal, and beneath. In the physical world, *yin* is associated with the

earth, moon, darkness, cold, and femaleness. The usual attributes of *yang* include hard, moving, initiating, guiding, giving, releasing, insubstantial, external, and above. In the physical world, *yang* is associated with the sky, sun, heat, light, and maleness.

In Taiji Quan practice, the concepts of *yin* and *yang* are used ubiquitously in the description of techniques. The back of the body, for example, is *yin* and the front is *yang*; the lower part of the body is *yin* and the upper part is *yang*. When a palm faces the body, it is called a *yin* palm; when it faces away from the body, it is called a *yang* palm. The leg that supports the weight of the body is called *yin*; the unweighted leg is called *yang*. Soft movement is *yin* and hard movement is *yang*. Defense is *yin* and offense is *yang*. It is commonly said that Taiji Quan is about *yin* and *yang*.

Taiji Quan was clearly derived from the *taiji* principle in traditional philosophy. In the most famous and important Taiji Quan classic, the first sentences state: “*Taiji*, born of *wuji*, is the potential for either *dong* (movement) or *jing* (stillness), the potential for a state of being that is either dynamic or static. It is the mother or the source of *yin* and *yang*.” This passage describes the basic concept of *taiji* and signals that a martial art bearing its name must follow its principles. It also defines the principle of Taiji Quan. It is very important to keep the *taiji* principle in mind at all times while training and to apply it devotedly in practice. If an action does not obey the *taiji* principle, then it is not a Taiji Quan skill.

The main ideas encompassed by the *taiji* principle and explained in Zhou Dunyi’s article, “Explanation of the Taiji Diagram,” are:

*Wuji* becomes *taiji*. This is called Dao, the fundamental, universal law of nature. Dao is invisible and controls every aspect of the universe.

The two basic attributes in Dao are *dong* (movement) and *jing* (stillness). *Dong*’s attribute is *yang* and *jing*’s attribute is *yin*. *Yin* and *yang*, as carriers of Dao called *qi*, make Dao manifest. This is expressed in the classics as

*Because everything in Taiji Quan derives from the change, conversion, and development of yin and yang, an understanding of the principle and practice of yin and yang is clearly vital to your training.*

“one *yin* and one *yang* together are Dao.” *Yin* and *yang* must be attached to *qi* before Dao can be made visible and applied.

In *liangyi*, *yin* and *yang* separate. Movement generates *yang*; but when movement reaches its limit, stillness arises. Stillness generates *yin*. When stillness reaches its limit, movement is reborn. Movement, thus, is the root of stillness and stillness the root of movement. This does not mean, however, that movement and stillness are the beginning or the end of each other. There is no beginning and end. The life of the universe proceeds in never-ending cycles.

In *taiji*, *yin* exists because *yang* exists, and *yang* exists because *yin* exists. *Yin* and *yang* support each other and can transmute into each other. *Yang qi* generates maleness, and *yin qi* generates femaleness. These two basic *qi* are expressions of the law of nature and create all things.

*Yang* contains some *yin*, and *yin* contains some *yang*.

Everything is generated from *yin* and *yang*. They give birth to endless change and development. All change follows the basic principle of Dao and Taiji.

Taiji or Dao is the fundamental principle. It encompasses the whole universe yet is small enough to reside in the tiniest fragments of matter. It dwells in everything and extends everywhere. The starting point for this principle is the concept of “*wu zhong sheng you*,” which holds that “being” or “having” comes from “non-being” or “not having”.

As *taiji* is born from *wuji* and is the source of *yin* and *yang*, there should be no intention or movement as you begin your Taiji Quan practice. This condition reflects the original *wuji* state. When an attack comes and you start to react, you enter the *taiji* state in which *yin* and *yang* are generated according to your opponent’s movements. Because all skills follow the *yin-yang* principle, it is sometimes said that Taiji Quan is the practice of *yin* and *yang* skills. Because everything in Taiji Quan derives from the change, conversion, and development of *yin* and *yang*, an understanding of the principle and practice of *yin* and *yang* is clearly vital to your training.

The most important thing to understand in your training is the relationship between dynamic and static states, between movement and stillness. Change is a permanent state, but stillness must always be maintained internally. Stillness is a temporary state, but the tendency for change must always be kept alive within. The existence of each state always implies the existence of the other. This is a very difficult point to understand and distinguishes Taiji Quan from all other martial art styles. Other styles apply

*yin* and *yang* as separate concepts and express the *liangyi* state. It is intuitively easier to understand dynamic and static states as separate and distinct than it is to conceive of them together as a single potential for both movement and stillness.

The integration of *yin* and *yang* is often called “keeping the center.” The usual term for this in Taiji Quan is *zhong ji* or central limit. It is also referred to as *xuan*, which means “mystery” or “darkness.” *Xuan* is described in a famous passage as “the mystery that can be either *yin* or *yang* or neither *yin* nor *yang*. Mystery upon mystery, it is the doorway leading to the refined understanding of all concepts.”

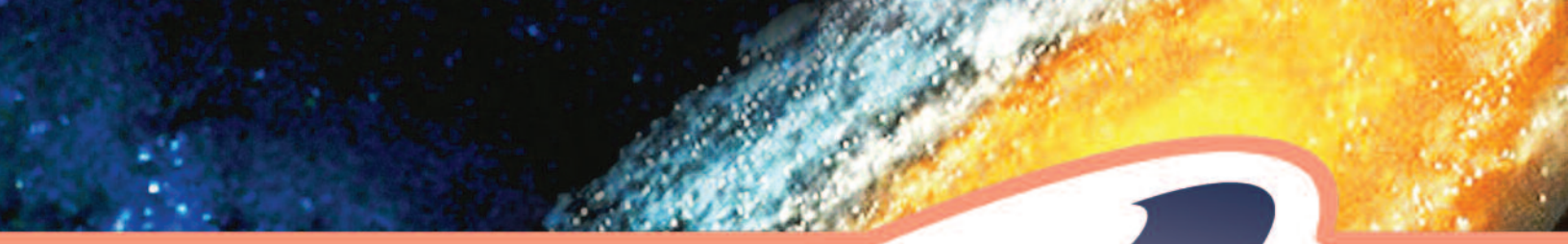
Since Taiji Quan is founded on the principle of *taiji*, this principle must infuse your practice at all times. All discussions and expressions of *taiji* should include an understanding of *yin* and *yang*. In Taiji Quan practice, *yin* is expressed in responses that are soft, substantial, still, passive, and that yield to the opponent; *yang* is expressed in responses that are hard, insubstantial, moving, active, and that lead or direct the opponent. Defense skills are usually characterized as *yin* because they are receptive or passive; offensive skills are usually characterized as *yang* because they initiate action. It is important to remember that in Taiji Quan all action and reaction must be consistent with the *yin-yang* principle as expressed in the *Taiji* circle. Inside this circle, *yin* and *yang* are in a state of continuous change and mutual support.

You must always be aware of the opportunity or potential for either movement or stillness. This requires that you avoid all pre-conceived notions or plans for what to do next. Every action must be based solely on your feeling at the moment. In push hands, for example, when you touch your opponent you should maintain *wuji* by not planning your response. When you receive information from touching your opponent, you enter *taiji* by either attacking (which expresses movement) or defending (which expresses stillness). Your choice should depend only on your feeling. Keep in mind that your attack also encompasses your defense; and your defense contains within it your next attack.

In most martial arts, whether simple or complex, the techniques used in practice and fighting are the same. The purpose of practice is to be able to apply these techniques directly in fighting. Taiji Quan practice is different in that it focuses on the expression of the *taiji* principle. The skills practiced are designed to illustrate this principle and to help students develop responses that apply the principle correctly. There is no training of preset sequences of movement that can be repeated directly in fighting situations. Rather, the skills are applied solely in response

*The most important thing to understand in your training is the relationship between dynamic and static states, between movement and stillness.*





to the student's immediate feelings during a fight. This is a specialized ability developed only in Taiji Quan training, which is said to have no techniques; movement itself is the method.

Another distinction between Taiji Quan and the other martial arts is that in the latter, offensive and defensive skills are practiced and applied separately. Even if they are performed simultaneously, they are experienced internally as separate. This method expresses the *liangyi* state, and the skills developed are *liangyi* skills. In Taiji Quan skills, *yin* and *yang* are inextricably bound together, with each one generating the other.

In Taiji Quan practice, internal training is emphasized much more than external training. All physical movement should occur naturally without conscious intent or a sense of restriction. It should start from a state of nothingness or insubstantiality that nevertheless has limitless potential. This method proceeds from *wuji* to *taiji*. In Taiji Quan practice, the mind and heart should be quiet, reflecting stillness, but this stillness is not synonymous with an absence of movement. There is movement inside stillness and it can be initiated by the slightest touch.

Although Taiji Quan practice involves constant change expressed as movement, this movement does not imply the absence of stillness. There is stillness inside movement so that an inner sense of calm and quiet can be maintained even during the most vigorous activity. This is referred to as *bao yuan shou yi* or maintaining the original *shen*, *yi*, and *qi* and keeping the focus on Dao. The key to Taiji Quan is the interacting potential of movement and stillness.

Given that *yin* and *yang* skills contain each other and can be transformed seamlessly from one to the other, it is always the case that during an attack, whenever the defense component becomes greater than the offense component, the movement is changed from an attack to a defense. A defensive movement can be changed to an attack in a similar manner. This gradual exchange of attack and defense is called *zhuan hua*, and it should occur as a smooth and slow dissolution of one into the other. *Zhuan hua* also occurs when *yin* converts to *yang* and *yang* converts to *yin*.

In *taiji*, *yin* and *yang* are always in balance. It is not possible to shift abruptly from one to the other like a digital switch. Such a dichotomous change is called *cha yi*, and it illustrates the way *yin* and *yang* are usually understood and applied in martial arts other than Taiji Quan. When *yin* and *yang* are applied in Taiji Quan, *zhuan hua* is the more descriptive concept and one of most important to understand. The contrast between *zhuan hua* and *cha yi* is another key difference between Taiji Quan and other martial arts.

*The key to Taiji Quan is the interacting potential of movement and stillness.*

When the *taiji* principle and its related concepts are applied to fighting situations, the basic fighting principle of Taiji Quan emerges. This principle holds that one must use the most efficient way to win a fight. It shapes the training method of Taiji Quan and differentiates Taiji Quan from other martial arts.

Although the physical movements of Taiji Quan are similar to those used in other martial arts, they arise from internal events rather than from observable events. In most martial arts, the goal is to increase power; in Taiji Quan you should constantly be asking yourself how to reduce your force and still win. The goal is to achieve maximum efficiency and the appearance of "small force." If the goal is reached, a less physically powerful person can defeat a more powerful opponent. To attain this result, a specific method of practice is needed.

Taiji Quan strategies for achieving the highest efficiency in fighting include: borrowing force from your opponent and turning the force back against him; luring your opponent to move in for an attack and then pulling back into emptiness; and using four ounces to defend against a thousand pounds. The basic skills used are: *zhan* which means "to stick to and bounce up"; *nian* which means "to adhere to"; *lian* which means "to link"; and *sui* which means "to follow." All the techniques of Taiji Quan are based on these four skills, and sensitivity is a prerequisite for developing each of them. Sensitivity allows you to apprehend your opponent's plans and capacities as well as to understand your own.

The highest level of achievement in Taiji Quan training is the ability to "use four ounces to beat a thousand pounds." As this adage suggests, if you are exerting 100 units of force to beat 200 units, you are already in the right mode of practice and further practice will improve your skill. To become more efficient, you must borrow force from your opponent. This, in turn, requires that you induce him to commit himself to an attack and then follow his movement until you sense a vulnerability in his offense. You must, in other words, "lure him into emptiness" by yielding and following. To do this, you need a well-developed sense of timing and direction. This in turn depends on your ability to identify and locate *yin* and *yang* and to understand *jin* or internal force. All of this is possible only if you develop your sensitivity so that you are able to know yourself and your opponent. ☯

(From *Combat Techniques of Taiji, Xingyi, and Bagua* by Lu Shengli, English translation by Zhang Yun, published by North Atlantic Books, copyright © 2006 by Lu Shengli. Pgs.64 -73 Reprinted by permission of publisher.)







# Push Hands: *Fundamental Skills and Theory*

A conversation with Yang Laoshi, Dave Barrett  
and Lance Lu

**E**xplanations 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.

**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 your



**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

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 缠 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 come 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!





**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.





**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. ☯

Photography: Steve Pellerin

# 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-arng, 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，溜趨縫隙之謂也；  
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.37.

"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

### Works Cited:

- Chen, Yearning K., *Tai Chi Chuan, It's effects and practical applications*, Newcastle Publishing, 1979
- Cheng, Man-ch'ing, *Tai Chi Ch'uan, A Simplified method for Health and Self Defense*, Richmond: North Atlantic Books, 1981
- Cheng, Man-ch'ing, *Advanced T'ai Chi Form Instructions*, translated by Douglas Wile Brooklyn: Sweet Ch'i Press, 1985
- Gaffney, David & Davidine Siaw-Voon Sim, *Chen Style Taijiquan, The Source of Taiji Boxing*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2006
- Jou, Tsung Hwa, *The Tao of Tai Chi Chuan*, Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Books, 1980
- Lee, Ying-ang, *Lee's Modified Tai Chi Chuan for Health*, Hong Kong: Unicorn Press, 1979
- Olson, Stuart Alve, *The Intrinsic Energies of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, Chen Kung Series Volume 2*, St. Paul: Dragon Door Publications, 1994
- Swaim, Louis (Translator), Fu Zhongwen (Author), *Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan*, Berkeley: Blue Snake Books, 2006
- Wang, Peisheng and Zeng, Weqi, *Wu Style Taijiquan*, Hong Kong: Hai Feng Publishing, 1983
- Yun, Zhang, *Four key skills in Push Hands and Fighting*, Tai Chi Magazine Vol.25, #2, April 2001
- Yun, Zhang, *The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, A Manual of Taiji Jian*, New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1998

## 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 (𠄎) 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. (𠄎)	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 (辵) 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, He2 (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".



By Helen Smeja, M.D.  
Montreal Yang Chengfu  
Tai Chi Chuan Center

## Tai Chi Chuan Wen Da

*Questions on Tai Chi Chuan answered  
by Master Yang Jun*

This is a collection of questions that came up during Yang Laoshi's 2008 Seminar in Montreal. Working from my notes, and with the help of my fellow students, here are the Master's answers.

### **How should we shift weight from one leg to another?**

The weight shift onto the other foot occurs from heel to ball to toe. The step should be even and smooth and one shouldn't put too much weight on the foot. It should feel like you are walking on thin ice. The shift of weight should be gradual as you switch your center from one leg to the other and the weight should end up centered on the bubbling well of the foot.

### **What is the bubbling well?**



The "bubbling well" is an acupuncture point on the sole of your foot, near the base of the ball of your foot, towards the midline (near the apex of the "V" of the ball of your foot). It is the place of your foot where you generally want to feel your weight centered throughout the form (except during some transitions where your weight temporarily shifts to the edge of your foot).

### **Where should we be looking when we are doing the form?**

Looking is connected with the spirit and much of the spirit is expressed through the eyes; we say that the eyes are the window of the heart. Generally speaking, when doing the form, we are looking straight forward. We follow the main arm direction and follow the meaning of the movement.

### **What should we be thinking when we are doing the form?**

At first, you will need to think of how to do the

movements. As a second step, when you are practicing alone, you can imagine you are practicing with an opponent. At the next step, you no longer need to think about an opponent. In fact, you should not be thinking of any one thing in particular. You want your mind to be centered, and if you think about one thing, you will think about it too much. You want to keep your mind calm and centered.

### **Sometimes when I practice Tai Chi my hands shake. Why is that?**

There are a couple of reasons. One could be that you are nervous. In that case, it is important to work on calming your mind and centering yourself. Another reason could be that you are sending out too much energy, that is, you are too stiff. In that case, you need to relax more when you are practicing.

### **How should we be breathing when we do the form?**

While practicing the hand form, your breathing should be quiet, calm, slow and at an even pace. Performing the form in slow motion helps build a foundation and calm, slow breathing helps to store energy. When breathing, you inhale through the nose and exhale through the nose and you should make no sound. The mouth is closed, but not too tightly. Generally, the feeling of the breathing should feel natural during the form. Later, one should coordinate the breath with the movements, but the best time to work on this is when you are practicing the form on your own (i.e. when you don't also have to coordinate your movements with a larger group.). When you are breathing in, you are

太極拳問答





storing energy and when you are breathing out, you are releasing energy.

When one practices explosive energy (Fa Jin), certain movements are practiced fast and you need to make the correct sound for the particular movement. Some movements require longer energy release and others, a shorter energy release.

**What kind of advice would you give to someone who has been practicing the form for three years, is comfortable with the sequence, has some understanding of the ten principles, and yet does not “feel” anything when doing the form?**

I would advise to start to pay more attention to the “empty/full” of each posture throughout the form. By becoming aware and paying more attention to the opening/closing or yin/yang change of each posture as you go through the form, you will gradually start to feel a wave-like sensation as you move through the form and this will make your practice much more enjoyable.

**Can you clarify the concept of empty/full?**

Determining whether something is empty or full depends on whether you are talking about energy or weight (you cannot mix the two). It is more precise to speak about the yin/yang being clear. In that case, we are talking more about energy than weight. When you are up against an opponent, your goal is to make your opponent's yin/yang or empty/ full confused. If you can keep changing your yin/yang, you can stay alive. If you keep changing, your empty/full will be clear.

**How fast should we do the weapons forms?**

In competition, the sword form should be completed between 3 minutes and 30 seconds and 4 minutes. During self practice, it should generally be done in under 5 minutes (4 minutes is too fast). When you do the form, if your breath is too tight, it is too fast for you. However, you do require a certain amount of speed in order to make the tassel fly. The saber form should be done in less than 2 minutes. Generally, it is done in 1 minute 50 seconds. It can be finished in 1 minute 30 seconds to show a lot of strength.

**When I practice the form three times in a row, during the third repetition it often happens to me that I forget where I am and I snap out of the flow of the form as I realize I am “lost”. Do you have some words of advice for me?**

One can say that in the practice of taijiquan, the form is important, yet the form is also not important. It depends on the level at which you are training and your particular focus at a given time during your practice. Initially, the practice of taijiquan consisted more of the practice of individual movements. Over time, these movements were woven into a form.

When we begin our practice of taijiquan, the form is very important. Learning the different movements and their transitions, as well as the sequence, helps lay a foundation for our practice in various areas including concentration, balance, continuity and flow, and relaxation.

After you have become comfortable with the movements and the sequence, you will find yourself more focused on the energy flow. At this point, the form itself becomes less important. It is often after you have done the form a few times that you will start to feel more of the energy flow and it is cultivating this feeling that becomes more important. At this point, (particularly if you are practicing on your own!) you can nurture this feeling of energy flow and weave together your own set of movements as you enjoy and maintain your flow.

At the next level of your practice, harmony and the principles become the most important focus. The method to achieve this is relaxation. It is through this relaxation that we seek to expand the body, heart and mind and balance ourselves, our thoughts, our feelings, our relationships, our lives. Though we seek to be relaxed throughout the different stages of our training and practice, achieving this state of relaxation requires the foundation work (the form is important), energy and flow work and spirit work (the form is not important).

So when you find yourself getting “lost” during your third repetition, do not get frustrated, but embrace it and use it as an opportunity to work on your energy and flow. ☯

# 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY INTERVIEW WITH MASTER YANG ZHENDUO

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



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

**YZD:** Thank you!

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

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

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

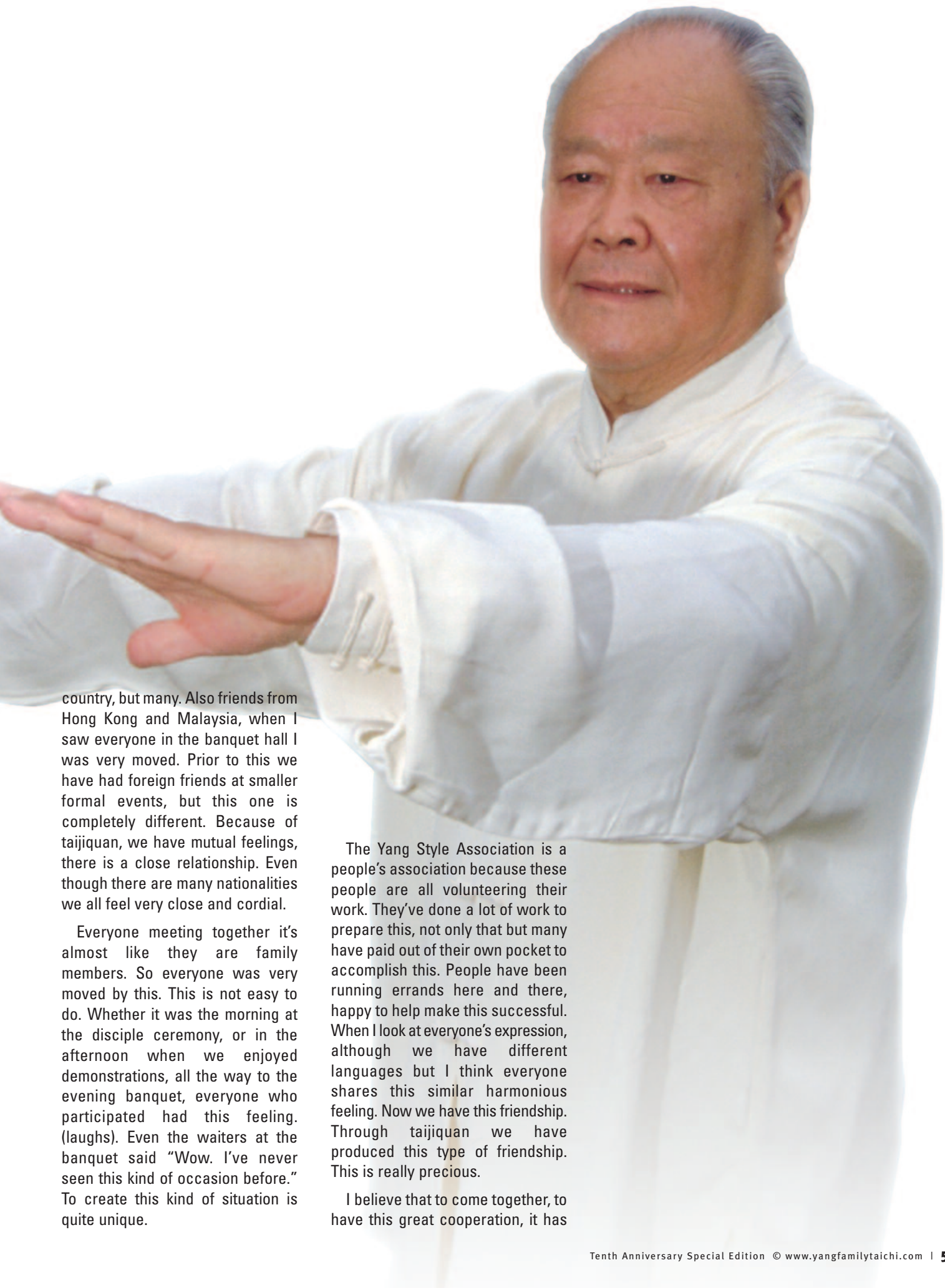
Yang Style has been developing steadily, beginning with Yang Lu Chan, my great grandfather to my

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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



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

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

people become more healthy and enjoy longer life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

**YZD:** So now we have these modern tools. In the past we had VCR tapes and now we’ve got the DVDs. This is a study tool. Many people use these in China. After we produced these I would frequently go out and meet many people. They’d say “Master Yang, I know you! Where do I know you from? The DVD!” (laughs) ...They were studying from the DVD. But this kind of studying is similar to learning from a book. Some people can study well in this way. Others have more difficulty understanding. We say that the relaxation of the joints, muscles and ligaments and the extension of the frame are key techniques (fang song, fang kai), but to understand this from the video is perhaps difficult. When you watch the tapes they can help to a certain extent. But, if you are with some people who understand it pretty well, they don’t have to be teachers, friends are ok, then this can also be a help. This is perhaps better. If you really don’t have these kinds of taiji friends, it’s hard to say. Everyone is different. In China we say that everyone has different abilities to understand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Theoretical Sources for Taiji Philosophy

## General Surveys of Chinese Philosophy:

By Audi Peal

This is the second volume in a series describing the history of science and civilization in China in great detail. This particular volume gives excellent summaries of many of the “classical” schools of Chinese thought that had emerged by the end of the Warring States period, including: Confucians (Ru Jia), Taoists (Dao Jia), Mohists (Mo Jia), Logicians (Ming Jia), Legalists (Fa Jia), and Naturalists (Yin-Yang Jia). It also gives excellent descriptions of Neo Confucian (Li Jia). The summaries include strategic quotes from original sources to give a direct and unfiltered understanding of the material. Anyone interested in the fundamentals of traditional Chinese philosophy would do well to begin here.

**Needham, Joseph. Science and Civilization in China, Vol 2, History of Scientific Thought.**

Cambridge University Press. 1956.

This is volume one of a comprehensive series on Chinese Philosophy. As the title states, it starts from the beginnings of Chinese history and concludes in 1600. The book goes into great depth on the development and history of Chinese philosophy, treating it as an organic whole that has developed and changed over the years. The vast majority of significant Chinese philosophers and the classical canon are discussed. Anyone with a strong interest in philosophy and wanting to know in depth about Chinese philosophy and its developments would be well served by this work.

**De Bary, Theodore and Bloom, Irene. Sources of Chinese Tradition from Earliest Times to 1600.**

Columbia University Press, 1999, 2nd Ed.

### Original Source Materials on the Web:

**Zhou Dunyi's "Explanation of the Taiji Diagram" (Taijitu Shuo).**

➤ <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Writings/Chou.htm>

This website has both translations and commentary on what is one of the foundational texts of the Neo-Confucians and was standard reading for all educated Chinese for more than half a millennium. It is also arguably the source of what the Taiji Classics mean when they discuss the philosophical terms Taiji, Wuji, Yin, Yang, stillness, movement, and their attributes. This is a short document and well worth a read.

**Zhou Dunyi's "Explanation of the Taiji Diagram" (Taijitu Shuo) with commentary by Zhu Xi.**

➤ <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Writings/TJTS-Zhu.pdf>

This is the same as the preceding, except that it contains commentary by the Song Dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi, who was pivotal in defining and interpreting the works we know as the Confucian canon.

➤ <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Writings/Spirituality.htm>

This website, which is related to the two preceding ones, gives interesting background, as well as citations to source documents, on the Neo-Confucian

view of many terms important to Taiji practitioners, such jing (essence), qi, and shen (spirit).

**Laozi's Daodejing (Also spelled as Tao Te Ching).**

➤ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>

This is one of the foundational texts of Daoism and one of the most translated works written in Chinese. The style of writing, while quite profound, is still poetic and quite readable. Important themes for the Taiji practitioner are: soft overcoming hard, the value of emptiness, and achieving everything necessary by doing nothing (wuwei). This is a relatively short read of 81 short sections or chapters. As of January 4, 2009, Wikipedia also has a good summary of the themes in this work at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daodejing>

**Sunzi's Art of War (Bingfa).**

➤ [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Art\\_of\\_War\\_\(Sun\)](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War_(Sun))

Sunzi (also spelled as Sun-Tzu) is one of the best known militarists of the Warring States period. His work retains immense popularity and has even begun to influence many corporate boardrooms. The theme of the book is the tactics and strategies needed to wage war successfully. In thirteen short chapters, Sunzi's work describes how to tackle confrontation. Of particular interest for Taiji practitioners are chapters 4, 5, and 6, which explain the concepts of “winning with ease,” energy (shi), and empty and full (xu shi). ☯



By Holly Sweeney-Hillman,  
Center Director,  
Montclair, NJ

## Looking through the *Lens of Science:*

# The Nature of Balance and the Practice of Tai Chi Chuan

The ability to balance in an upright posture is most sought after in our earliest youth and again in our elder years. The young lady, Siera, is at the point in her life when she is investing great effort, concentration, and practice in learning uprightness. Soon, her mastery of upright balance will allow her to walk, run, and reach for things without toppling over. She will have many falls as she learns the art of balancing but she won't be discouraged by them. To move upright is a prize well worth the tumbles. The talent for sustaining balance in fully upright posture is unique to human beings and is our most treasured physical capability. We spend more time learning how to balance than any other creature. (Figure 2) As we get older, we sometimes feel less confident about our ability to balance. Losing our ability to balance makes us fearful about everyday activities, threatens our independence and damages our self-esteem. Falling and fear of falling are regarded as serious health threats for older people.



Siera, Skye

In the United States, the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) has invested millions of dollars over the past 20 years in fall-related research. Tai Chi leads the list of effective fall prevention programs that the NCDC advocates and the NCDC has approved additional funding for continued research into the benefits of Tai Chi for public health and safety.<sup>1</sup> Although the research examined by the NCDC focused on the incidence of falling in different populations, there is obviously a relationship between falling and the ability to balance. It is the premise of this article that the study and regular practice of Tai Chi helps people to find and maintain balance while standing or moving upright. To support this idea, we'll look at what science has to say about balance and then we'll look at how Tai Chi practice addresses the different components of balance.

In the world of science, a generally accepted definition of balance is being able to maintain a body's center of gravity over its base of support. This is precisely what the toddler, Siera, is learning how to do. Although many other creatures can balance upright, more or less perpendicular to the ground, for short periods of time, only humans take on this difficult balancing act as a full time job and without a tail to help. Why humans ever decided to do this is a matter of continuing scholarly debate. Science writer Jocelyn Rice has identified a minimum of twelve competing hypotheses about where, why, when, and how humans got up off their knuckles. All the theories share one theme in common and that is motivation. Humans wanted to be upright for a reason; they wanted something that prolonged upright balance could provide. Here are a few of the motivational theories that have been put forth by various





figure 2

We spend more time learning to stand than any other creature.

scientists: early humans wanted to see above the grasses so they could spot potential predators (thus placing our origin on the savannah), early humans wanted to keep their heads above water (this places our origin in swamps), or, early humans wanted to be able to carry things over long distances and needed to have their hands free for this purpose (this theory hints that we are well evolved for the shopping mall).

In addition to motivation, some scientists have been interested in examining the biomechanical advantages to balancing upright, making the assumption that Nature chooses efficiency whenever possible. Biomechanically, the human gait of covering ground on two legs requires less energy than covering ground on four legs. The walking gait of humans is one of Nature's most efficient inventions, involving minimal muscular effort because the legs are swung like pendulums using rhythmic momentum instead of muscle energy. Most researchers have focused on walking as the gait that defines human evolution. That's why Harvard University anthropologist Daniel Lieberman

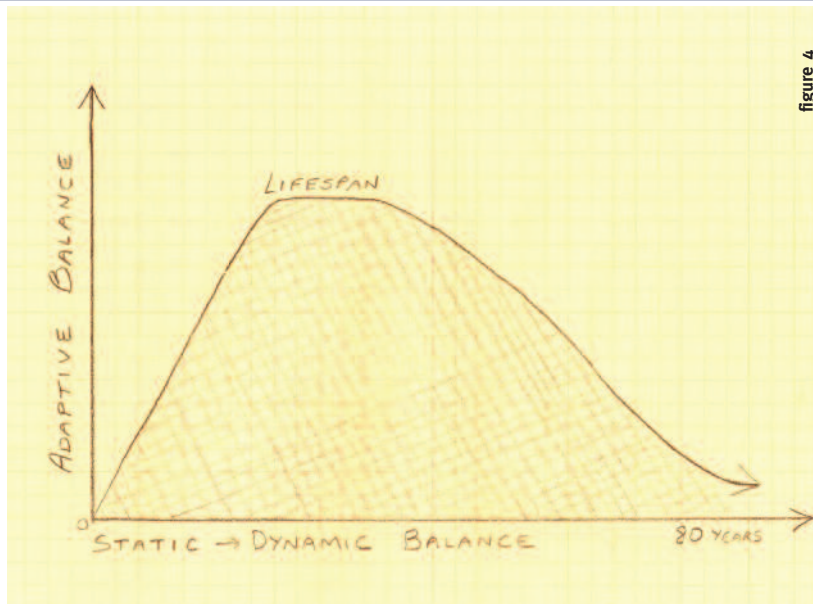
has caused quite a stir in the scientific community with his hypothesis that the motivation that created our uprightness was running. Lieberman observes that humans can pretty much outrun any mammal in the world, particularly in hot dry conditions, because of the efficiency of our upright balance on two legs. Humans are not particularly fast runners but can run for much longer periods of time than other animals. Lieberman proposes that hunting and scavenging motivated our running behavior, stating that early humans could literally wear out their prey in prolonged chases. Lieberman makes some compelling observations about human structure to support his argument: compared to other primates, humans have huge extensor muscles, notably the gluteal muscles (i.e. butt muscles) and the hamstrings. These muscles become strongly developed by running because the body is leaning forward. Lieberman likes to say that when a person is running, they are always falling. These muscles contract strongly to help stabilize the torso, so we don't topple forward. Figure 3 shows drawings from Leonardo Da Vinci's notebook. Leonardo was also fascinated by the massive system of extensor muscles in our hips and legs. In addition to our well developed extensors, Professor Lieberman cites the tendon structure of the human leg as further support for his 'born to run' theory of human development. Humans have long tendons in the lower legs which act as energy storing springs. Lieberman says this kind of tendon structure only evolves in animals designed to run. Lastly, he talks about features of our head structure that sets us apart from apes and allows us to be good runners. He notes that humans have more sensitive semicircular canals than other apes. Semicircular canals are structures in the vestibular system of our inner ears that act as gyroscopes, meaning our heads can be bouncing all over the place and we can still figure



figure 3

out which way is up in order to maintain our balance. Also, humans have a special ligament which connects our head to our spine. This ligament, the nuchal ligament, stabilizes our head so it is held steady while we are running. Fast running and jumping animals like horses, dogs, rabbits, and humans all have well-developed nuchal ligaments. In humans, the strength and elasticity of this ligament also contributes greatly to our ability to hold our head upright as we stand or move around. Lieberman maintains that none of these structural features could have evolved from walking.<sup>2</sup>

If Lieberman's observations are correct, running may have helped early humans evolve some of the structural capacities that help us balance today: large extensor muscles that stabilize us from pitching forward, highly developed semicircular canals that keep us from being disoriented while we are moving, strong nuchal ligaments to hold our



heads upright. If running was the why that helped us develop some structural advantages to balance upright, the next problem is how, how do we accomplish our balancing act?

Although we frequently use the phrase “holding our balance,” true balance is an equilibrium of the moment. To achieve equilibrium, a person must possess three distinct but interrelated types of balance: static, dynamic, and adaptive. Static balance is the ability to sustain a chosen posture\*. Dynamic balance is the ability to maintain chosen postures while moving. Adaptive balance is the ability to move while maintaining chosen postures while negotiating changing environmental demands. Figure 4 diagrams the competence gained in these skills over the course of human life span. The highest peak in the graph occurs at young adult age, a gradual decline is seen in aging populations. To better understand how balance skills are lost, let’s first take a look at how they are gained. (\*The term “chosen posture” recognizes that the human balance spectrum is broad, going from the average person’s more or less uprightness to the acrobat’s perfect upsidedownness to the figure skater’s twirling miracle of unfolding configurations while revolving on the blade of one skate.)

Scientists have spent decades trying to understand exactly what is going on as the young lady in Figure 1 goes from dependence to independence by mastering the art of balance. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a researcher named Magnus created a theory of “reflex hierarchy” to explain how balance is achieved. His theory was based on countless gruesome experiments on animals. He interpreted his experiments with animals as indicating that the ability to balance was based on reflexes, in other words, balance was ‘hardwired’ into our physiology and would manifest in a predictable and orderly sequence of postural behaviors. However, the postures and movement responses of animals when examined outside the contrived and artificial parameters of his laboratory studies did not support his theories. Scientists began to realize that the variety and spontaneity of postures and movements that are witnessed in healthy animals interacting in a natural environment could not be explained by Magnus’s theories which confined balance to the rigid limits of postural reflexes. Although his theories shaped an entire generation’s thinking on child development, by the 1980’s another group of scientists had replaced Magnus’s reflex model with an entirely different model based on systems theory.<sup>3</sup>

Systems theory states that: “A system, by definition, consists of an organized set of parts (the subsystem level) that interact with each other in such a way as to generate unique properties (emergents) expressed at the level of the whole (the systems level). In other words, systems generate unique behaviors that emerge out of a complex set of subsystem/system/suprasystem interactions.”<sup>4</sup>

The application of systems theory to the phenomenon of human movement created scientific research that was quite different from Magnus’s laboratory studies. Interesting findings began to emerge from this new research and one of the most important discoveries was that flexibility of behavior is achieved through practice and repetition and that with repetition, movement patterns become more adaptable and less rigid or stereotypic. “Practice and experience allow the organization of action systems to accomplish a functional end... rather than acquiring a motor program, the individual develops a skill. That skill is the ability to use information to coordinate movements and postures flexibly in the context of a task.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, we could define balance as a learned and practiced complex skill rather than a rote function of the nervous system.

Action systems researchers made another important observation about balance. They discovered that balance while performing an activity was dependent on anticipatory postural adjustments. They demonstrated that postural changes preceded the overt movements necessary to perform a task and these changes prepared the body to balance. This anticipatory postural activity prevented a person from losing their balance as they performed different activities. These findings indicated that cognition is an important component of the ability to balance.<sup>6</sup>



“Cognition” is defined as the process of knowing, perceiving, and remembering. Regarding human movement, cognition is knowing what you want to do (for instance, “Brush knee left, push right”), perceiving what you are doing as you move (how closely your “brush knee left, push right” conforms to the standard your teacher shows you), and remembering what you did so you can try it again. Master Yang Zhenduo’s comments on the progression of Tai Chi study, moving from “approximate” to “detailed” to “refined” practice is a perfect description of how cognition affects practice and practice affects cognition.

Before any movement is performed, our nervous system needs to anticipate how to balance our body as it moves. This anticipatory activation of postural muscles is based on experience and the process of cognition. Studies have shown that lack of ability among older adults to anticipate and adequately prepare their postural control systems for movement was linked to losing balance during experiments. Studies also showed that older adults showed proportionally more improvement in balance tests than younger subjects if the balance tests were repeated several times. This suggests that older adults intuitively rely more on cognition than reaction time to control their balance.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to cognition, there are physiological factors that contribute to the ability to balance. The big three in this category are: the vestibular system, vision, and proprioception.

The vestibular system, located in our inner ears, resolves conflicts about balance through a complex structure of semicircular canals which can sense acceleration and turning. (These are the structures that Lieberman says evolved from running). Most of us have had experiences which give examples of our vestibular system

in action. One is when we are in a stopped vehicle and the vehicle next to us starts moving. Our eyes can be tricked into perceiving that we are moving but in a moment or two our vestibular system sorts things out and lets us know that we are not moving but standing still. Another example is when we are in an elevator that zooms down fast. Even after the elevator has stopped moving, we have a dizzy feeling that we are moving but in a moment, the fluid within our semicircular canals stops swirling and we know we are no longer moving. These examples show that the vestibular system tends to exert a controlling influence over all other sensory systems of balance. Degeneration or disturbance within the vestibular system is not uncommon in people over 50 years of age. People with vestibular problems can be helped by doing exercises which help them rely more on vision and proprioception.<sup>8</sup> Tai Chi movements like ‘Wave Hands Like Clouds’, which combine turning head movements with a specific visual focus are similar to movements used in vestibular therapy. Also, Tai Chi’s emphasis on developing a ‘root’ in the feet is an example of how we use proprioception to increase confidence in our sense of balance.

Research conducted on balance consistently finds that vision impairment due to low light conditions or poor eyesight negatively affects our ability to balance. Most of us know the relationship between sight and balance through direct experience. The aging process frequently reduces visual capabilities and this is an important consideration when looking at balance in older adults. Relying more on proprioception can help reduce the impact of poor vision on balance.

Proprioception is the foundation of all our movements and the ability to achieve equilibrium. It is the sense that allows us to know the positions of our limbs, the amount of tension in our muscles,

and how much our joints are bent and the amount of pressure we can feel within our joints. Proprioception could be described as our internal GPS that maps our structure and body mechanics on a moment to moment basis. Disuse, more than aging, reduces our proprioceptive abilities. In the Big Three of Balance, (vestibular system, vision, and proprioception) proprioception seems to be the most robust, trainable, and durable sense throughout our lifespan.

However, it is important to keep in mind that it is the interaction between these three systems that enable us to balance. This interaction is a function of our nervous system and our nervous system demonstrates “plasticity” throughout our lifetime.

“Plasticity” describes the ability of our nervous system to make structural changes in response to internal and external demands. One of the structural changes the nervous system is capable of throughout our lifetime is to continue to grow dendrites. Dendrites are long tentacle shaped projections that receive incoming stimuli and pass the information to the cell body of a neuron. Neurons are the nerve cells that allow the nervous system to exchange information throughout the body and to direct movement activities. Every dendrite is branched to receive multiple inputs from other neurons. You could imagine a neuron like the trunk of a tree and the dendrites as the branches, the more branches on the tree, the wider the area of shade the tree would cast. In the nervous system, this area of shade would be termed a “receptor field”. The bigger and denser the ‘shade’ cast by the forest of dendrites, the richer and more detailed is the information network shared by neurons. This information network allows us to put together many bits of sensory information in order to accomplish complex tasks like balancing.<sup>9</sup> In the

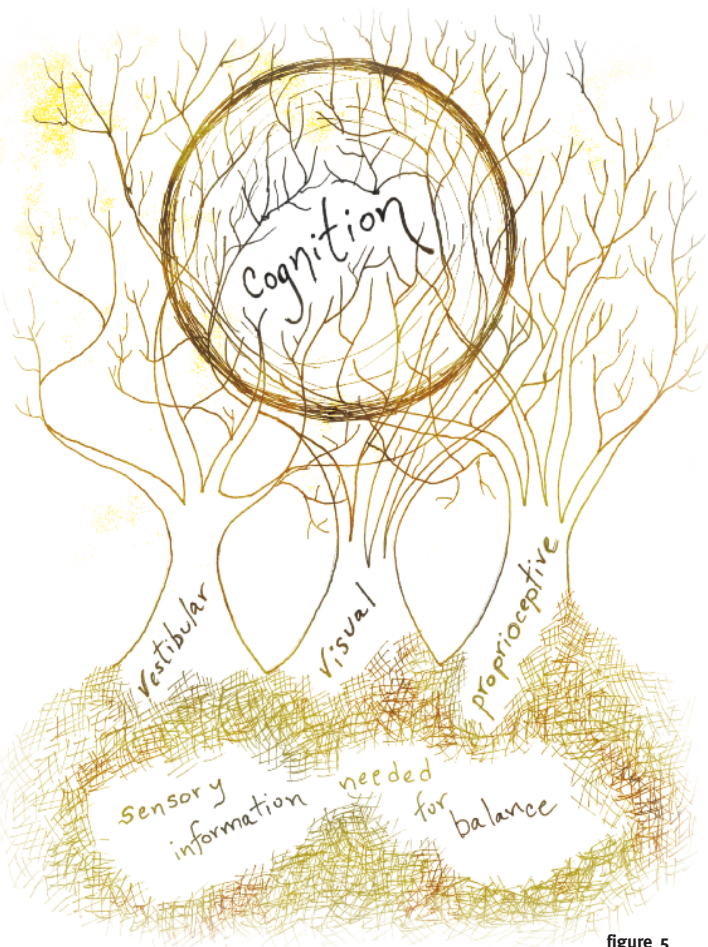


figure 5

language of Yang Chengfu's 10 Principles of Tai Chi Practice, the 'dendrite forest' helps the nervous system *unify internal and external*. The growth of dendrites is a perfect example of the concept of "use it or lose it". The number of dendrites we have to use will be determined by how much we challenge our capabilities and by how much we practice to maintain our abilities.

Figure 5 is a fanciful illustration of the 'dendrite forest' of our nervous system. Cognition is shown as the sunlight that motivates the growth of the forest. Neurons of the vestibular, visual, and proprioceptive 'trees' grow countless dendrites to connect and integrate all the pieces of sensory information that we need to balance. The dense shade under the trees represents a rich field of sensory information that we can use to find our balance.

This article has investigated the components needed to produce balance; defining balance as being able to maintain center of gravity over base of support while standing still (static balance), while moving (dynamic balance), and while spontaneously coping with the environment (adaptive balance). The elements that appear to be essential in the development of balance are motivation, certain physical capabilities, cognition, and sensory integration.

Scientific thought on balance leans toward motivation as the reason we balance upright in the first place. We have evolved to want to balance upright which is different from saying we evolved knowing how to do it. We have to learn to balance, we are not born knowing how. In order to keep

balancing throughout our lifetime, we have to keep wanting to learn how to do it. Just like the toddler Siera, we have to keep trying till we get it right. As our bodies change, we can keep our balance skills up to date with practice. The more we practice, the more we'll get it right.

The way Tai Chi is practiced addresses the different types of balance. The individual postures of Tai Chi give students the opportunity to practice static balances of varying degrees of difficulty. The Tai Chi forms, which are sequences of postures connected by transitional movements, challenge dynamic balance capabilities. Practicing Tai Chi in a group and in different environments provides adaptive balance practice. Tai Chi Tui Shou (push hands) provides the most rigorous





practice requiring all three types of balance.

Figure 6 shows some students practicing Tai Chi sword form. We can see that the way they are balancing on one leg looks more like running than walking. Tai Chi develops physical capabilities that walking alone could not develop. The lowered, bent knee stances of Tai Chi develop strength in the extensor muscles of the hip and leg. Increased strength in these muscles help stabilize us when we move, keeping our torso from toppling forward. The way weight is transferred from one leg to another in Tai Chi is completely different from walking and requires much more muscle effort. The slow controlled transfer of weight maintains higher numbers of motor units and thereby contributes to increased strength overall. The mechanics of Tai Chi movement are closer to running than walking. Just like running, we move from a supporting bent leg toward an extended forward leg. Like running in slow motion, we gradually bend the forward leg while we straighten the back leg to transfer weight from one leg to another. In Tai Chi, we bend and straighten our legs like compressing and releasing springs. This pattern of compression and release conditions our tendons.<sup>10</sup>

The variety of Tai Chi movements and the precision of their performance gives cognitive abilities quite a work-out. An experienced Tai Chi player knows more than a hundred distinct postures and many more transition movements that connect one posture to the next in a continuous flow of movement that can go on for nearly an hour to complete just one Tai Chi form sequence. It takes a lot of cognitive skill to remember, anticipate, and track so many discrete

movements. The cognitive aspects of Tai Chi practice give students a huge repertoire of anticipatory balance strategies.

Tai Chi practice includes persistent application of sensory integration. For example, the “prepare” (yu bei shi) posture at the opening of each form represents specific and intense sensory observation: Is my head upright? Is my back lifted up and my chest contained? Is my waist area loose? Are my shoulders relaxed down? Is my spirit lifted? Is my mind tranquil? As a student progresses through the study of Tai Chi, the challenge of integrating sensory information increases, leading to incredible sensory refinement – the ability to sense beyond structure to perceive energy and intention.

But, as any Tai Chi player knows, it all comes down to practice. And practice is a matter of motivation and motivation is a matter of spirit. If you can raise up your spirit and practice Tai Chi every day, you will improve your balance. Science is on your side.



#### Sources for this article:

1. Sleet, David; Moffett, Daphne; Stevens, Judy; “CDC’s research portfolio in older adult fall prevention: a review of progress, 1985-2005, and future research directions.” *J Safety Res.*, 39 (3) June 2008; pgs.259-67
2. Hadzipetros, Peter; “Born to Run, Harvard anthropologist Daniel Lieberman on why humans run”, CBC News in OnLine, April 11, 2007
3. Cech, Donna; Martin, Suzanne, *Functional Movement Development Across the Life Span*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1995, pgs. 275-281
4. Schwartz, G.: “From Behavior Therapy to Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Toward an Integrative Health Science”. *Paradigms in Behavior Therapy*, ed. Fishman, D.; Rotgers, F.; Franks, C.; 1988, pgs. 294-320.
5. Cech and Martin, op.cit., pg. 281
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 280
7. Woollacott, Marjorie. “Gait and postural control in the aging adult”; *Disorders of Posture and Gait*, ed. Bles, W. and Brandt, T., Amsterdam, Elsevier Press, 1986, pgs.42-52.
8. Cech and Martin, op.cit., pgs. 223-243
9. *Ibid.*, pgs. 190-233.
10. Sweeney, Holly. “Practice Continuously and without interruption.” *The International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association Journal*, Vol. 16, Spring 2005. 14 -16

# The Annotated Lexicon: ZHONG DING

Introduction By Audi Peal

To understand “equilibrium” from the traditional Chinese standpoint, one has to understand the word “zhong.” “Zhong” has “middle” or “central” as its core meaning. “Center” is perhaps too specific, although “zhong” can indeed be used in compounds that mean “center.” In philosophical terms, “zhong” can also have a more dynamic and moral connotation. For example, “zhong” is the word used in the Confucian classic the Doctrine of the Mean to signify the “equilibrium” or “mean” that every cultivated individual should follow as a “golden rule.”

The word “Zhonghe,” which is a compound of “zhong” (“middle”) and “he” (“harmonize”), can mean “neutralize” or “balance out” in the chemical sense, but can also be interpreted as “impartial” or “even-tempered.” The two syllables can also be interpreted as separate words, meaning “equilibrium” and “harmony.” It can be seen in the Doctrine of the Mean with this latter meaning.

In the original Chinese, Doctrine of the Mean is “Zhongyong.” In modern Chinese, this word just means “mediocrity,” but its meaning in the Doctrine of the Mean is somewhat disputed. The Song Dynasty Neo-Confucians explained the term as follows: “zhong” means “not tilting or leaning” (“bu pian bu yi.”), i.e., impartial, and “without excess or deficiency” (“wu guo bu ji”), while “yong” means “ordinary.” These Neo-Confucian terms are also quoted in Zhang Sanfeng’s Taiji Treatise, among other places. They refer to keeping to what Master Yang Jun has referred to as the “middle way,” and to what could be thought of as the Goldilocks middle that is “just right.” If you control the “fulcrum” in the “middle,” anywhere else the opponent goes will be an inferior position. Sunzi says in the Art of War: “Putting yourself beyond defeat is in your hands, but defeating the opponent is in his hands.”

"Zhongding" is, as far as I know, only a Tai Chi term of art. It can be understood as meaning: "centrally fixed/stable/settled/calm" or "firming up on/in the middle." It refers to one of the "five steps" ("wu bu"): namely, "advancing step" ("jin bu"), "retreating step" ("tui bu"), "look/attend left" ("zuo gu"), "gaze/anticipate right" ("you pan"), and "central equilibrium" ("zhongding"). Some practitioners stress that "zhongding" is the basis of

the other four "steps."

"Ding" in the expression "zhongding" means to "make settled/firm/stable/fixed/certain." It is a very common word in Chinese and is used in a wide range of expressions, including the equivalent of words like "definite(ly)," "making a decision," "stabilizing," and "becoming composed." An important usage in Taijiquan is in the expression "ding shi" ("final posture" or "settled posture"), which can refer to the point

where the transitional movements of a form "posture" ("shi") "settle" ("ding") on a final expression before moving on to the next posture.

In English, the term "equilibrium" connotes a natural still point resulting from a dynamic situation. This point, however, is otherwise neutral. The most salient uses of similar Chinese philosophical terms, however, carry overtones of what is efficient, moral, or in harmony with the natural order. ☯



By Andy Lee  
Center Director,  
East Brunswick NJ

## ZHŌNG DÌNG - Analysis of 中定

Zhōng - Analysis of 中				
Character		Spelling	Hanzi Rebus	Genealogy
Simplified	Traditional	拼音/Pīnyīn	Radical	Etymology
中	中	Zhōng	<p>丨 gēn a vertical stroke (also read xin or tui) is one stroke and its position in character: middle. Gun, a down stroke, a perpendicular.</p> <p>The ancient form of this character resembles “口” flag and with 丨 gēn drawn in the middle, the center.</p>	<p>The character represents a square target pierced in the center by an arrow. It symbolizes many things in many characters. Here, it is the arrow, but it could also be a flag or banner pole. In classical China, various nationalities of Hua Xian lived in the Yellow River areas. They considered themselves to be in the center of the earth. They considered themselves to be the “center country”, while all other areas surrounding them were referred to as “四方” sì fāng: the four directions. Since then “中国” Zhōngguó--China became the name of the country.</p>
中 Zhōng	In Classical Chinese, Zhong is well-translated as center or middle. When used as the country's name, Zhong places China at the center of the world.			

### Zhōng Dìng 中定 (central equilibrium)

1. Keep balanced and be stable so that your body is ready to do anything.
2. Keep the central axis of the wheel of your body stable, flexible.
3. It refers to the internal factor of movement, not a physical point.
4. It is the stable post of the nervous system.
5. It is earth, which means everything is generated from it.
6. If the balance cannot be held, any other technique or posture and movement, meaning the transition, cannot be done skillfully.

Dìng - Analysis of 定				
Character		Spelling	Hanzi Rebus	Genealogy
Simplified	Traditional	拼音/Pīnyīn	Radical	Etymology
定	定	dìng	宀 miǎn roof, cover	Living indoors is a critical part for life, and only after having your own home can life settle and be stable.
			止 zhǐ is a pictograph of a foot with protruding toes 疋 zhèng/zhèng depicts a 止 zhǐ-foot walking towards the position represented by “一 yī. means stop 止 at the line 一 yī .	The ancient form depicts a 宀 miǎn: roof on top and on bottom 疋 zhèng walking toward a destination—home.
定 Dìng	To fix, to settle, certain, quiet. It is order - Zhèng 疋 in the house, Miǎn 宀 --roof. It can mean a person has returned home safely. In other characters, “ding” represents this meaning. For example: 平定 píngdìng: peace or 安定 āndìng: quiet and stable.			

Hanzi	Pinyin	Footwork	Quality	Direction
中定	Zhōng Dìng	Center/axis on the compass	Central Equilibrium	Center



# 中定

## COMMENTARY ON ZHONG DING



Compiled by  
Dave Barrett  
Association Journal  
Editor

*"Zhong ding is not the same as balance. The word zhong in Chinese is centered and ding is stillness. Balance can be attained by intention and strain even in a very distorted body position, while zhong ding is natural, as in the classic description, 'As if the body were supported from all sides'."*

Dr. Wen Zee, "Zhong-ding: Hidden Weapon of Form, Push Hands", pg.20

*"While standing, the body is centered and comfortable, supported in all eight directions. The tailbone is centered, the spirit rises to the crown, from top to bottom, one straight line."*

Chen Xin, quoted in *Chen Style Taijiquan*, pg. 81

*"Stability means that you must keep your body centered, a condition referred to as zhong ding. To be stable or to maintain your center, however does not imply that your body should not move. The goal is to keep your body stable while it is in motion. If your movements are correct, Qi will sink to the dantian and the resulting feeling will be that your feet are extending down into the ground like the roots of a tree. This feeling indicates that you have achieved stability. Just as yin always contains yang and vice versa, stability must always include a sense of nimbleness, and nimbleness a sense of stability"*

Zhang Yun, *The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship*, pg. 30

*"The tan-t'ien is located in the abdomen, closer to the navel. This is what in physiology is called the body's 'center of gravity', located along the line of the waist. Its position and significance is precisely the same as the tan t'ien. The center of gravity is also what T'ai Chi Ch'uan calls, 'central equilibrium'. Central equilibrium cannot be separated from the tan t'ien. This is why the Classics say, 'At all times keep the waist in mind', 'the waist is the ruler' and 'the waist is the pivot'. In other words we can say that T'ai Chi Ch'uan is an exercise which emphasizes man's center of gravity."*

Cheng Man-Ching, *Advanced T'ai Chi Form Instructions*, pg.50

*"Developing the waist is the best way to find your center, your whole body pivot. Once you start wobbling at the hip you have lost your unitary connection."*

Chen Youze, "On creating a State of Song", pg.16

*"The waist is the dominant part for all movements in Taijiquan, the 'source of sense and perception'. Only when the waist is loosened, can all the movements be made with agility and coordination. Loosening of the waist helps the Qi to sink downward, and increases the root of the body or zhong ding (central equilibrium)."*

Wu Ying-hua & Ma Yueh-liang, *Wu Style Taijiquan*, pg.18

*"Body centered and upright implies that the torso be naturally upright. It doesn't mean that the spine should be completely straight, which in reality is not possible. By tucking in your sacrum, you can lessen the strain on your lower back and allow your waist to move more freely"*

Liang Shou-Yu, *A Guide to Taijiquan*, pg 16

*"The term 'centered' refers to the time just prior to opening/closing or extending/contracting. Stability is expressed through silence and stillness. In being centered and stable, the mind is clear and the person does not lean to any direction. Centered stability is at the root of the Way. Centeredness is achieved by moving neither too much nor too little. Stability requires that one maintain smooth breathing and not be lured by apparent promise of gain. Always remain centered when reacting with the opponent, whether you are extending, contracting, advancing, retreating, or looking to either side. Once a person can operate from the center of the circle, their range of reaction becomes limitless. This is a guiding principle for all parts of the body."*

Wu Kung Cho, "An excerpt from the Golden Book"

*"Keeping one's center of gravity stable in whatever position they take and also in the process of transferring from one position to another is a fundamental skill a student of Taijiquan should seek to build up through their daily practice. To be able to maintain one's own balance at all times and to detect an opponent's center of gravity and to sense and make use of the slightest loss of balance instantly is what distinguishes the outstanding from the ordinary"*

Yang Yuting, in *Wang Peisheng's, Wu Style Taijiquan*, pg. 216

*"In studying balance seek equilibrium of stability throughout all postures and movements. Whether standing still, or leaning forward and backward, each stance has its inherent center. Follow the principles of push hands to study the relationship of the balance of forces expressed through all movements. To remain constantly rooted and stable, the center of gravity must remain as low as possible."*

Wu Kung Cho, "An excerpt from the Golden Book"

*"The crown of the head is like a plumb line and therefore we speak of 'suspension from the crown of the head'. The two arms are like a balance that circle to left and right, the waist is like the stem of the balance. If one stands like a plumb line and balance, then the slightest deviation in lightness, heaviness, floating or sinking will be obvious."*

From the Yang Family Forty Chapters,

*Lost T'ai Chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*, pg.77

*"With the spine and waist as sustaining pillar and axis and the feet firmly rooted aground, all other parts of the body are maneuvered in pairs and fours, simultaneously and rhythmically, feeling yourself like a fish propelling under the water or a bird sailing above the air, forgetting all worldly worries and attaining a heavenly state of serenity."*

Wen Shan Huang, *Fundamentals of Tai Chi Chuan*, pg.. 28

*"Not leaning or inclining does not refer to the physical body but to a natural centeredness of the spirit...Although the body may depart from the vertical, the vertical still exists internally; we must not be dogmatic."*

Chen Xin, quoted in *Tai Chi's Ancestors*, pg. 81

### WORKS CITED:

Chen, Youze, "On creating a State of Song", *Tai Chi Magazine* Vol.32, #6, December 2008

Cheng, Man-ch'ing, *Advanced T'ai Chi Form Instructions*, translated by Douglas Wile Brooklyn: Sweet Ch'i Press, 1985

Gaffney, David & Davidine Siaw-Voon Sim, *Chen Style Taijiquan, The Source of Taiji Boxing*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2006

Huang Wen-Shan, *Fundamentals of Tai Chi Ch'uan*, Hong Kong: South Sky Book Co., 1973

Liang Shou-Yu and Wu Wen-Ching, *A Guide to Taijiquan, 24 & 48 Postures with Applications*, Jamaica Plain, Ma.: YMAA Publications, 1993

Wang, Peisheng and Zeng, Weiqi, *Wu Style Taijiquan*, Hong Kong: Hai Feng Publishing, 1983

Wen, Zee, M.D., "Zhong-din: Hidden Weapon in Form, Push Hands", *Tai Chi Magazine* Vol. 19 #1, February 1995

Wile, Douglas, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996

Wile, Douglas, *Tai Chi's Ancestors, The Making of an Internal Martial Art*, New City, Ny.: Sweet Ch'i Press, 1999

Wu Kung Cho, "An Excerpt from the Golden Book", *Tai Chi Magazine* Vol. 19, #2, April 1995

Wu Ying-Hua & Ma Yueh-Liang, *Wu Style Taijiquan, Forms, Concepts and Applications of the Original Style*, Hong Kong: Shanghai Book Co. 1988

Yun, Zhang, *The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship, A Manual of Taiji Jian*, New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1998



# Tai Chi and Multiple Sclerosis Restoring a Sense of Balance and Strength



By Karen Thaxton

I have MS (multiple sclerosis), which has negatively affected my sense of balance and control of my right leg. However, I now regularly practice Tai Chi, and Tai Chi has at least partially restored my sense of balance, control of my right leg, and self-confidence.

When I was finally diagnosed with MS nearly ten years ago, I had already realized that something was wrong. My body, which had done nearly everything I'd ever wanted it to do for so many years, now was not nearly so obedient. My right leg wouldn't function properly, preventing me from running 10K's or even a few steps. When I was tired, the foot would flop and drag, so that even walking became a chore, leading to stumbling and lurching—at times I looked like I was drunk. Worse, my sense of balance was rapidly fading, leaving me to fall if I tilted a few degrees from the perpendicular. I experienced several bad falls, both at home and outdoors while hiking. I couldn't even shower without holding onto the shower wall for balance. The actual diagnosis of MS led initially to a real sense of betrayal, in addition to outrage and helplessness. I didn't look old or weak, but I moved as though I were both elderly and weak. I felt that my horizons were becoming prematurely limited, and I lost my self-confidence as well.

Two years ago I decided it was up to me to stop, or at least delay, the impact of MS on my body, since there is no cure. While one can't control the progression of MS, I figured that there must be something I could do to regain or compensate for some of the abilities I had lost. I tried yoga—that was out, because of my balance problems. I tried Pilates—that was great for core strength, but I couldn't control my right leg in the mat exercises. I tried the treadmill and some other machines—they didn't address balance, although they did help with endurance.

Finally I enrolled in Dave Barrett's Tai Chi class, only because there wasn't anything else available at that hour. Although I had tried Tai Chi several times before, it always seemed more like a dance class than anything else. Dave's class was a revelation. It was a tough discipline, a form of meditation, and a real workout from the first day. My legs ached. I could neither Row the Boat nor do the Cat Walk. I couldn't even do a proper bow stance. There was no way I could transfer weight smoothly from one leg to another. For someone who had practiced karate (and ballet, running and aerobic dance, etc.), this inability to reach perfection in a seemingly simple discipline was a surprise. My competitive nature took over—there was no way I was not going to be able to master Tai Chi. But I still had to start by "mastering" the bow stance without wobbling.

Tai Chi is not easy. But by concentrating on the mechanics of Tai Chi, first practicing the postures, and then very gradually being able to string them together into the long form, I was also slowly improving both my balance and my leg strength, although I didn't realize it at the beginning. I know that "Life is short, Tai Chi is long", but consistent Tai Chi practice has already led to major benefits for me. Incidentally, not all benefits are physical—just being in a class with other motivated students, realizing they are supportive and non-competitive, has been a morale booster as well.

Until reading Holly Sweeney-Hillman's commentary on "The Nature of Balance and the Practice of Tai Chi Chuan", I had not thought about the actual progression of the improvement I experienced as a result of Tai Chi. Specifically, her reference to the three interrelated types of balance (static, dynamic and adaptive) describes the sequence that I seem to have followed, although I hadn't analyzed it at the time.

My static balance improvement became noticeable when I slowly began to "master" the



bow stance. Initially I had to look down at my feet to be able to tell where they were, and I couldn't hold the bow stance for very long without tilting or wobbling. As my leg strength improved, however, so did my balance. Rowing the Boat was extremely difficult for me when my right foot was leading, and it took a year until I was able to row with some degree of control. Other postures became steadier, too, including White Crane Spreads its Wings, Single Whip, and Needle at Sea Bottom. Once I attained the postures, I could hold them steadily and concentrate on form.

Next came various transition movements and the Cat Walk (dynamic balance), at which I'm still making progress. At first I could not move from one leg to another in a cat-like manner. And moving into postures such as High Pat the Horse felt awkward. It took nearly a year and a half for me to understand the principle of weight transfer, and then to internalize Dave's voice coaching "heel, to ball, to toe" or "weight over the bubbling well point". (And it takes a patient Tai Chi instructor to let this understanding slowly evolve on the part of his students.) After two years, I'm at the point where I can often perform the Cat Walk, although looking like a clumsy cat much of the time. Because I do understand the principle of the various transition movements, I can now concentrate on achieving them smoothly. I had to think deliberately about when and how to transfer weight before I could do it without lurching, or without always thinking about it.

Finally I progressed to adaptive balance skills, and some of this I attribute again to Dave's voice. For example, I have been working with a personal trainer to increase overall strength, balance and flexibility. Initially, I could not do lunges at all. As my Tai Chi skills increased, so did my ability to reach a lunge position and hold it. Only two months ago I finally was able to begin the challenge of taking lunge-steps the entire length of the gym floor. However, the lunges were wobbly and I wasn't able to transfer weight smoothly until that internalized voice talking about "heel, to ball, to toe" and "bubbling well point," helped guide those lunges. Now I can lunge-step across the entire floor without even thinking about it.

Further examples of adaptive balance include my new-found ability to descend flights of stairs without clutching the railing (although I do need to keep in contact with the railing to know which way is up). This is weight-shifting at its best for

me, especially since now I can descend the stairs of the Paris metro without panic. I can stand in the shower and move to reach the soap or shampoo without holding on to the wall. When I walked in Portland's recent snow, I was able to weight-shift gradually from one foot to another without falling once. And I can walk across the living room floor, full coffee cup in hand, without spilling one drop.

All of these are skills that I'd never had to think about in the past. But the Tai Chi principles I've learned in class, and have at least partially internalized, are now guiding me in everyday movements, those very movements I'd NEVER had to think about before. In new situations (as in walking on wet leaves), I sometimes need to concentrate on weight shifting, but there are times when I realize that I haven't even thought about a new task requiring balance yet have performed it successfully.

I have just reread the first paragraph of Holly Sweeney-Hillman's paper, and I feel it could have been written about me. Initially I had to invest "great effort, concentration and practice in learning uprightnes" during Tai Chi practice and in small tasks, but my balance and ability to function have noticeably improved and are continuing to improve, even though my MS has not diminished. I have regained my confidence in my own body, and I relish new tasks and adventures. My personal trainer has noticed the improvement in strength and balance and is constantly coming up with new exercises for me to perform, none of which I would ever have thought about attempting before I began Tai Chi practice. And, finally, my neurologist has noticed such an improvement that he is now recommending Tai Chi to some of his other MS patients.

Tai Chi is not a cure for MS (there is no cure for MS), but faithful Tai Chi practice can definitely lead to an improvement in both balance and leg strength, which in turn leads to a noticeable improvement in physical skills, everyday functioning, and morale and self-confidence. I may never be able to do Right or Left Separation kicks, but I'm able to be a Golden Rooster standing on my left leg, and almost a Golden Rooster standing on my right leg. I urge others with balance problems to begin to practice Tai Chi. And don't give up—it takes quite a while to see improvement, but you will be surprised and pleased with these vital skills that you can relearn. ☯



INTERNATIONAL YANG FAMILY TAI CHI CHUAN ASSOCIATION



[www. YANG FAMILY TAI CHI com](http://www.YANG_FAMILY_TAI_CHI.com)