



YANG FAMILY
TAI CHI CHUAN



**Grandmaster
Chen Xiaowang**

Tai Chi Chuan

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President's Letter

Dear Association Member,

In the 12 years since the founding of the International Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Association, 2011 marks the year that our Association has made the most significant changes to our organization. Even with these organizational additions and changes, the interests of our Association members still remain the cornerstone of the Association's development and improvement.

The comprehensive blueprint of these significant additions involves raising the standards of Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan in these areas: technique, ranking assessment, training of judges, and assessment of instructors. Another important growth area is the continuing development of the Tai Chi Chuan Academy for educating and training Tai Chi Chuan instructors.

After receiving suggestions from our members, we have made modifications to the ranking process. These include setting up 3 pre-ranking levels to precede the 9 ranks of the Association Ranking System. Center Directors and Instructors will conduct the assessments for these 3 pre-ranking levels. We have also added Push Hands to the requirements for Ranks 4 to 6. Additionally, the Association has formed a Judges Advisory Board and a Judges Registry to improve the standard of judging and to improve the qualifications of judges.

One of my dreams is the creation of a Tai Chi Chuan Teacher Academy. There have been many attempts at developing Tai Chi Chuan Schools and Colleges but successful ones are rare. One of the main reasons for this is that the locations of these schools and colleges were limited, which made it inconvenient for students to attend classes and train for an extended period of time. The International Association has Centers and instructors in 17 countries located throughout Europe, North America, South America and Asia, providing wide access for students. Our developmental focus is in training qualified instructors, enabling distributed learning and providing centralized training.

The Association has formed an Instructor Advisory Board and an Instructors Registry to develop teacher standards and policies and to assess the qualifications of Tai Chi Chuan teachers and to certify them. The Association now has 5 levels of instructors: Affiliated Instructor, Certified Instructor, Academy Instructor, Senior Instructor, and Master Instructor.

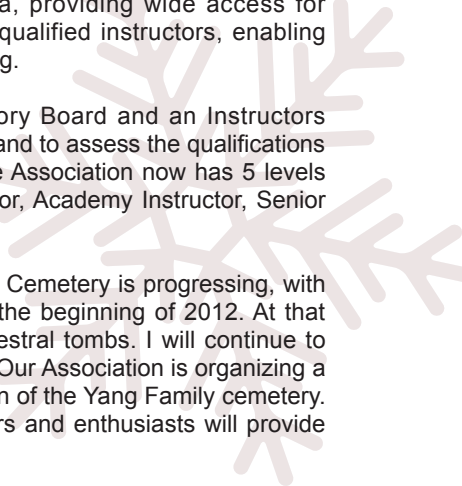
The construction of the Yang Tai Chi Chuan Family Cemetery is progressing, with the completion of the family tombs scheduled for the beginning of 2012. At that time, a ceremony will take place to move the ancestral tombs. I will continue to provide updates regarding any new developments. Our Association is organizing a fundraising effort in conjunction with the construction of the Yang Family cemetery. I hope that Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan practitioners and enthusiasts will provide generous support.

We are also actively organizing the 2012 China Adventure trip. Information regarding pricing, registration and competitions can be found on the Association's website. I hope we will meet in China!

Wishing everyone a Happy New Year!

Yang Jun,
President

Translated by Mui Gek Chan



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Cover: Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang



Gateway to the Internal: Zhan Zhuang

A conversation about Standing Meditation with Master Yang Jun

By **Eric Madsen**

With help by Sylvia Dambrauskas

Years ago, I heard Yang Laoshi talk about standing meditation in class. He stressed its importance but did not give many details. Heeding his advice, I started practice with the little knowledge I had. Being young and ambitious, I immediately started with thirty minutes. I set the alarm on my clock and started what was the most painful half hour I had ever experienced. I didn't know that keeping a clock nearby is a form of torture. Time seemed to have stopped. Soon, my legs burned and sweat poured from my body, pooling on the wood floor of my apartment. My breathing leapt into my throat and would not sink. Nothing I did could make the posture feel comfortable or natural.

When the thirty minutes passed, I shook uncontrollably. My feet were numb and the joints in my body were sore from holding the posture so long. Gradually, after many years, the practice has become much more comfortable and changed from something I dreaded to something I now welcome every morning.

My story is an example of how not to begin zhan zhuang training. Below, Yang Laoshi answers questions about the importance of balancing the internal energy and external posture. By starting this practice slowly and adding more time when it feels comfortable, it is much more likely that you'll continue.

What is Standing Meditation and why should someone practice it?

What you call standing meditation refers to the practice of zhan zhuang (站桩). Translated, zhan means "to stand" and zhuang means "pole", or to stand as a pole. It is called this because you are still. It is commonly used in qigong to calm your mind. We use this as foundational training when practicing martial arts.

Externally, in Yang Style Taijiquan, we follow the ten principles of Yang Chengfu: shoulders down, elbows down, head up, drop your hips, etc. Zhan zhuang helps develop proper posture

and corrects your body position. This is called xiu shen (修身). When you practice standing, you learn about body posture.

Zhan zhuang is the perfect static exercise. Holding these positions will naturally build leg strength and help create a stable root. It will calm your breathing and help develop your qi. In Chinese, there is a term called tiao xi (调吸). Tiao means conditioning, and xi means breath or breathing. Nurturing your breath will strengthen your internal energy. When your breathing is unified with your internal energy, your external body will become strong.

If you observe someone holding one of these positions, it doesn't look like they're doing very much. But, if you try holding the position for a long time, you'll find that it's actually very difficult.

Is the main purpose of zhan zhuang to help develop correct body posture?

That is the first step. Next is jing xin (静心), which means to calm your mind. Third is jing qi (静气). The qi sinks and nurtures your energy. If you nurture your qi, your body will be strong.

Taijiquan is a close-distance martial art where one should remain calm in any position or circumstance. There will be times when bodies are so close that you won't be able to rely on your sight. For this, we have a skill called "listening energy". When we talk about listening energy we are talking about getting information from your partner or opponent through physical contact. We refine this energy by calming the mind which makes our body more sensitive, and we can easily receive and process external information. When your mind is quiet, you are more sensitive. When it is noisy, you can't hear things clearly. We call this ling min (灵敏). You must be sensitive to the information coming from your opponent. How can you hear things when you are on the street and it's noisy? When you are at peace, like calm water, even if you hear a fly you can know its location.



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In Chinese medicine, there are three internal combinations, or nei sanhe (内三合). The first combination is the heart/mind and mind/consciousness together: xin yu yi he (心与意合). Next, the mind and qi combine: yi yu qi he (意与气合). Last, the qi and energy combine: qi yu li he (气与力合).

When standing, your heart and mind combine with your qi and energy. It all works together. In the saber poem there is the line, Xia Shi San He Zi You Zhao (下势三合自由招). What is San He? This refers to the three combinations we just discussed.

What is the correct body shape? How do we develop it?

If you understand Yang Chengfu's ten principles, then it's easy. The method is relaxation. There are many different standing postures and they all require you to be centered. For example, the posture Prepare in the hand form is one type of standing, also known as wuji zhuang (无极桩).

When trying to adhere to the principles, it is important not to exaggerate the standards. You want your chest sunk and back rounded, but how much? You cannot be too big nor do it too much, but also, you can't ignore this requirement. You must straighten your head, but you can't be stiff. Guidance from an experienced instructor is needed to tell what is too much or not enough. Even after you gain some experience doing the hand form and standing, and can find your center and balance yourself, you still need guidance.

Your breath must be long and deep, however, some people will make it too long and this can affect you negatively. Your qi will sink, but if you focus only on qi sinking then you will become stiff. You need to pay attention to these points, because the way of Taijiquan is natural; everything needs to be natural. When you think you've found your center, ask if this is natural. A lot of times you aren't as natural as you think, even though you feel comfortable. Over time, you come to realize what is natural. You need to follow the principles and apply them while standing.

You've shown a few different postures for standing. What about holding postures from the form?

When practicing zhan zhuang, use an even stance. Your weight should be evenly distributed, with the toe direction pointing straight ahead; the footwork is shoulder width or slightly wider. It's up to you to decide how low to stand. Also, the left and right side should be even.

There are other similar exercises where the weight is not even. This practice is called san ti shi (三体势) or san cai shi (三才势). San cai refers to the heavens, earth, and man: tian, di, ren (天地人). The footwork is a little different than the empty stance practiced in the hand form. In these exercises, we place the whole foot on the ground. Similar to Step Back and Repulse the Monkey, the weight is on the heel of the front leg but the whole foot touches the ground. Usually people start with wuji (无极) standing and later move on to taiji standing. Few people start with san ti shi.

Do you recommend people practice this wuji standing, as in the opening posture of our form, prior to doing taiji standing?

You can practice this anywhere and anytime. When I watch people standing around, they typically shift their weight to one side. Instead of shifting your weight to one side, you can use this time to practice wuji standing. Like I said, your weight is evenly distributed between the two legs and your knees are slightly bent. If you can sink your qi down, follow the principles and be natural, then it doesn't matter if your posture is high or low. You don't have to worry about your arms, just extend them by your side naturally.

How long should one stand? I started with a half an hour and it killed me.

No. You cannot start like that. You need to understand that there are two goals in standing. One goal is to improve your health through this exercise. The other is for people who want to deepen their martial arts practice.

I don't want to say how long or how low you should stand. You should follow your ability. Standing can be difficult, especially if you can't get into it. At first, all you feel are sore legs, back pain, and tense shoulders. It's hard to overcome this discomfort. As you continue, you will find that you can do it longer. Gradually the external pain disappears and it becomes comfortable and natural. Even though it may seem boring sometimes, zhan zhuang is gong (功), or fundamental training. It's hard work. It's something you have to do, not just in the beginning, but also throughout your practice.

There is a saying, "lian quan bu lian gong, dao lao yi chang kong" (练拳不练功, 到老一场空). It means that if you only go through the motions without developing skill through serious training, then you can practice your whole life but still achieve nothing. It's like building a house without a foundation. By practicing martial arts, you sow the seeds and after time they will ripen and you will have a harvest. But without gong, it's like there's nowhere to store the harvested food. Gong combines with qi and is stored inside your body.

Is it better to practice in a high posture or a low posture?

It depends on if it feels natural or not. If you go too low, it won't feel natural. You won't feel your qi sinking down and after a few minutes you will feel stiff.

What should we do if it starts to feel unnatural or uncomfortable?

When you reach this point, maintain the posture as long as you can. Settle your breathing and posture to be natural again. If you must, then stop.

Should you try to push through it?

It depends on who's asking. If that person is young, I will challenge them. If that person is a senior, then I usually won't. It just depends.

Sometimes when you stand for a long period of time, the body becomes stiff. However, if you keep on going, then it is possible to relax and release that tension.

Right, but it doesn't matter how long you stand. Some people can reach that point in five minutes; it may take others ten to twenty minutes, or longer. Once you get over that stiffness, it won't feel difficult anymore. You will start to feel balanced internally and externally. Once the external is comfortable, the internal will feel more comfortable. Then the qi will sink to the dantian (丹田). The qi will start to circulate to your legs and your root will feel connected. When standing, use your intent to envision combining heaven and earth with yourself. This allows you to gather qi from nature.

In class you have given guidance in standing. One instruction that stood out was that we should expand both our stomach and back while breathing. Is this to relax the waist?

Yes, but don't overdo it. There is a balance. Often when I try to get students to focus on one point, then they try too hard to get that feeling. It's very easy to overdo it if you focus only on immediate results.

How do we know when we are too stiff?

It depends on the individual. You need a teacher to guide you through the difficult parts. Keeping it basic and simple is better than making it unnecessarily complicated. Remember, the first principle is natural. At first, you can't tell if what you are doing is natural or not. Each of Yang Chengfu's ten principles asks you to find your center, but don't overdo it and become stiff.

Should we focus more on the dantian rather than the body posture?

At first, zhan zhuang calms your mind as you focus on correcting your body posture. It is an exercise that strengthens your legs and root. Later, the physical body is no longer a focus; focus on sinking your qi as it coordinates with your inhalation and exhalation. Then the qi will start flowing through your body like a wave, from up to down. Even though the body isn't moving, it feels like you are moving. You need to focus on your heart/mind: tiao xin yang qi (调心养气). Start with the external, then move to the internal. If you still struggle with the external, then you shouldn't concentrate on the internal.

We need the correct posture to allow this internal energy to work.

Right. We always need the internal and external to be combined together.

Again, about the breathing, you mentioned stomach breathing as our method. Is this the same as prenatal breathing?

If I say this, it can mislead people; it places too much focus on the internal. Your internal and external need to be balanced and support each other. Don't think about that too much. I believe that if you keep it simple and natural you will find the right way. If you use your mind to make the qi circulate in a certain way, then this can damage your nervous system. This is especially true for people practicing the xiao zhou tian (小周天) the microcosmic orbit, or small heavenly circle, because it asks you to reverse the circulation of the ren mai (任脉) and du mai (督脉), the conception and governing meridians.

There is one rule, and it doesn't matter if you know about Chinese medicine or not, everyone follows nature. Do what is natural. Find a teacher if you want to practice the xiao zhou tian.

How should we focus our mind while we are standing?

Your mind should focus on sinking your qi and feeling it drop to the dantian. We have a saying: "Your eyes ask your nose how it breathes. Your nose asks your mouth that the tongue touches the roof of your mouth, keeping your mouth closed. Your mouth asks your heart to make your mind calm." One of the benefits of standing is that it conditions your heart. Allow your heart and mind to be at peace, like water, and you will become more sensitive. When you can feel your breathing and qi sink, then the qi can move throughout your body, starting from the dantian. Fill your qi fully and extend it to all parts of your body. With inhaling and exhaling, you feel yin/yang change like a wave. Up and down, open and close. Gradually, this will come more from your dantian and less from your breath. With your dantian you will expend qi then store it back. From the dantian the qi will be sent to all the branches of the body. Your mind should focus on this.

You have shown in class a method of standing where we open and close our arms horizontally that is coordinated with our breathing.

This is a way to help you feel yin and yang change. Sometimes when you



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are standing there not moving, you can't feel this. Stand natural and relaxed; let your breathing be full and deep. Use abdominal breathing to feel your qi sink to the dantian, eventually reaching every part of the body. Then connect your whole body to your breathing. Coordinate the movements of your arms and legs with your breathing. This is called qi yi gu dong (气宜鼓荡). Your qi will overflow, eventually extending through your body and beyond, like a balloon being inflated.

This is the same feeling we should strive for while practicing the form, right?

When you are standing, you are not moving, but on the inside I want you to feel movement. When we practice the hand form, I want you to focus on being calm.

In each movement we should feel rooted and calm. From moving to not moving and from not moving into moving is yin changing into yang and yang changing into yin. When yin is at the top, then yang is beginning and when yang gets to the peak, then yin is beginning. You need to have dong jing (动静), movement and stillness combined. Your body moves and your energy flows from the dantian to the branches of the body. When you reach the end, you should be centered. Then everything comes back to the dantian. With every opening movement, yin and yang separate; when closing, yin and yang combine.

When breathing, do we move the qi and then settle the qi?

Right. You move the qi to the branches of the body and circulate it back to the dantian; like a wave, it expands and contracts. This comes from Wang Zongyue's theory on Taiji. Taiji zhe, wuji er sheng, yin yang zhi mu ye (太极者, 无极而生, 阴阳之母也。) Dong zhi ze fen (动之则分,) 'in movement yin and yang separate,' jing zhi ze he (静之则合) 'in stillness they come together'.

Is there any advice you want to give students practicing zhan zhuang?

Zhan zhuang is hard work. Standing can help make your mind more calm more centered. Having a calm mind will help your nervous system. You will also feel better and improve your health though deep breathing. When you breathe deeply it promotes circulation of the blood and the qi sinks down. This will help your lungs and respiratory system. Because we breathe deeply while standing, the qi and blood combine.

Like I said earlier, "lian quan bu lian gong, dao lao yi chang kong". Even though you practice the form daily, you need to spend some time practicing zhan zhuang. You don't have to find a special time to do it. You can do it while you wait for the bus. Just bend your knees slightly, sink your qi down, and use deep breathing. You will naturally find this connection. Train your mind to be calm and then you can practice anywhere.



WU JI ZHUANG

The feet point forward and are shoulder width apart with weight placed on the bubbling well. The legs are straight without locking the knees allowing the waist to relax and the hip to drop. The head lightly pushes upwards and is balanced by the relaxed waist. The eyes look forward and tongue touches the roof of the mouth. Arms rest on the side of the body with the fingers naturally extended. The entire body should have the feeling of extension and relaxation.



TAI CHI ZHUANG (HUN YUAN ZHUANG)

The footwork is shoulder width or slightly wider, with the toes pointing straight ahead and knees bent slightly. The knees and toes are aligned with the weight on the bubbling well. The head lifts and the eyes look forward and the tongue touches the roof of the mouth naturally keeping the mouth closed. The left and right sides of the body are centered, the arms are rounded in front of the chest, and the fingers point to each other. Shoulders and elbows are dropped and relaxed. Keep the mind concentrated on breathing deeply and let the qi sink to the dantian. Don't let the mind wander.



The chest is sunk and back is slightly rounded. The arms are extended with the elbows pulling the shoulders forward slightly. The shoulders pull the back balancing both left and right sides. The head lifts up. Relax the waist and drop the hips as if you are about to sit in a chair. The top of the head (bai hui) is aligned with the perineum over the bubbling well, making the front and back are centered. Take care that the knees don't go too far over the toes.



Looking Through the Lens of Science: Our Amazing Fascial Inner Net

*"You need to manifest yin/yang changes in your practice.
You need to have storage and sending out of energy."*

Master Yang Jun

By Holly Sweeney-Hillman

Bedminster/Montclair Center Director



Did you ever wonder how a tiny flea can jump 200 times its own height or how a clam can open its shell after it has clamped it shut? Surprisingly, the answer to these questions will help us understand some of the most central elements of Tai Chi Chuan theory and principles of practice.

So, let's look at the puzzles presented by the flea and the clam. The reason a flea can jump so high and a clam can reopen its shell lies in special tissues that store and then release mechanical energy with great efficiency.

In the case of the flea, the rubbery tissue is found in the knee joint of the flea. When the muscles in the flea's leg bends the knee joint, the rubber-like connective tissue stores energy like a compressed spring. When the muscles stop bending the knee, mechanical energy is released explosively from the connective tissue and the flea leaps with surprising power.

The clam closes its shell with the pulling force of strong muscles in the hinge of its shell. However, muscles can only exert a pulling force, so how is the clam able to push open its shell after it has been closed? The answer to this riddle also lies in specialized tissue in the hinge of the clam's shell. When muscles pull the shell shut, the rubbery material in the hinge stores the energy and then releases it, opening the shell after the muscles stop pulling it shut.¹

In mathematical terms, the amount of energy that a material can store is proportional to the material's stiffness multiplied by its extensibility.

'Stiffness' refers to how difficult it is to deform a material. For instance, wood from an oak tree is a relatively stiff because it takes a lot of energy to bend or break it.

'Extensibility' refers to how much any material will stretch or deform before it breaks. Wood from an oak tree is not very extensible, because it will not bend much before it breaks, although some wood, like that from a willow tree, may bend quite a bit before it breaks. In this example, we would say the willow wood is more extensible than the wood from the oak tree.

The rubbery tissue found in the flea's knee and the clam's hinge are examples of structural components that combine an ideal ratio of stiffness and extensibility for efficiently storing and releasing mechanical energy. We have tissues

in our bodies that perform the same function of storing and then releasing mechanical energy. Our tendons are star performers in this category, but there are other tissues that exhibit similar characteristics.²

These tissues can collectively be termed "connective tissues." Connective tissue cells form a continuous matrix within our bodies that includes our bones, cartilage, ligaments, tendons, and the fibrous fascial sheets that surround our organs and muscles. Connective tissues, also known as *fascia*, literally hold us together and give us the shape we recognize as ourselves as well as create a continuous and unbroken structural "inner net" within us. This fibrous inner net (the fascial system) is one of three holistic networks within our bodies. The other two are the fluid net (the vascular system) and the neural net (the nervous system). You have probably have heard of the vascular and nervous systems, but the physiological functions and anatomical importance of the fascial system is just now being acknowledged by the Western world.³

Using essentially the same biologic materials, but in varying proportions, connective tissue exhibits an astonishing range of properties beside the ability to store mechanical energy. It can communicate information throughout our entire bodies in a way that bypasses the nervous system and it interacts with our immune system in ways that are just being recognized.⁴ We will focus on the role of connective tissues in providing structural support and conservation of energy during movement. All connective tissue contains collagen and elastin fibers in varying proportions. As the proportion of these ingredients is changed, different kinds of connective tissue are created such as bone, cartilage, ligament, tendon, aponeurosis and thin fascial sheets. In addition to being made of essentially the same ingredients, all of these tissues share a characteristic: *plasticity*. Plasticity means the tissue will rearrange and exhibit different properties in response to the demands placed upon it. To do this, these tissues have to demonstrate *remodeling*.

Remodeling, a term from the lexicon of biomechanics, refers to a phenomenon that happens when a collagen/elastin tissue is stressed. Stress means the tissue experiences a mechanical force such as compression, tension, shear or torque. When the tissue is stressed, the bonds of its molecular structure are affected and energy is released in the form of a slight electric flow that is known as a piezo (pressure) electric charge. This mild electric





charge guides the process of remodeling, causing the stressed tissue to restructure: becoming stiffer or thicker as the cells within it are rearranged. Research has shown that tendons, for instance, remodel by developing more stiffness when they experience tension from muscle contractions. This stiffening response conserves muscle energy, because the action of the muscle is translated into movement of the skeleton with little energy loss. Micro imaging has shown that the naturally wavy collagen/elastin fibers within tendons gradually straighten out when the tendon experiences tension. It is this straightening of fibers, on a molecular level, that creates more stiffness. If the same tension is applied for a long period of time, the fibers will elongate, and this elongation process will continue at tiny increments for months, increasing the stiffness and extensibility of the tendon, and thus increasing the ability to store energy in the tendon. In other words, tendons can be conditioned to store more energy by applying a constant level of force over a prolonged period of time.⁵

Strain is the term used to describe the pattern of deformation that develops when a material responds to stress. If you pull a plastic bag between your hands, you will see strain lines, *Figure 1*. If you imagined the bag was a living tendon, the tendon would remodel along those lines of strain, creating more stiffness where it was stressed by tension. Stress and strain drive the process of remodeling for all connective tissues. *Figure 2* shows a diagram of a stress/strain curve that tests the strength of a tendon by putting it under increasing load (stress). As the collagen/elastin fibers within the tendon straighten, the tendon elongates (strain pattern) and the tendon is able to withstand increasing load.⁶

When we look at the changes that occur on a molecular level via stress/strain remodeling, we can begin to understand how we literally change our bodies for better or for worse by practicing certain postures and movements over and over again. *It is not just our tendons that change; our entire fibrous inner net remodels all the time.* Every moment we are alive, there are stress/strain patterns flickering and shifting across and through every dimension of our bodies. Our movement habits and practice become written into our structure via the phenomenon of tissue remodeling along these strain lines. The presence or absence of stress/strain patterns will cause physiological changes in our bones, ligaments, tendons, and all other fascial components of our inner net.

Knowing about the physiological reality of remodeling gives us more appreciation for the wisdom presented in the Tai Chi classics about the body's shape, waist, and

crown of the head:

"How can you practice Taijiquan without paying attention to the body's shape (i.e., upright torso), the waist, and the crown (i.e., head is suspended). If lacking any one of these three, you do not have to put more effort in Gongfu. The study of the waist and the crown can never be stopped in a lifetime. If the body's shape follows my wish, I can extend and feel comfortable. If you give up this truth, what can you reach in the end?"⁷

If we translated the above paragraph into the language of biomechanics, we could say: creating the proper strain lines through your body will create a piezo electric effect which will distribute throughout the connective tissue system, remodeling will occur along those lines of strain, creating beneficial structural changes and greater potential for storing energy.

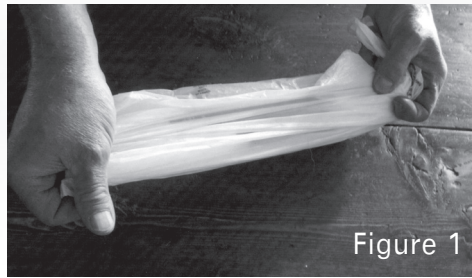


Figure 1

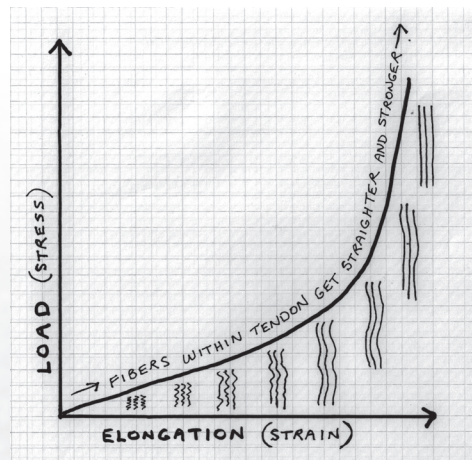


Figure 2

Knowing about the process of remodeling also makes it is easier to understand the concept of *Jin* in the literature of Tai Chi as an implicit and refined internal strength that can only be experienced by feeling it: "You can't tell the strength of a bow by looking at it, rather you must pull it to see if it has the potential to generate a lot of power."⁸ Power, in this context would relate to the ability to efficiently store and then quickly release mechanical energy. *This is precisely what our fibrous inner net tissues are designed to do if conditioned by proper practice techniques.* Obviously, this kind of conditioning effect is not visible from the outside. It is impossible to see if a person's tendons are rubbery and resilient or brittle and dry; it is impossible to tell how successfully a person can link together long lines of connection within his body to store and then release energy unless we can feel the force issued. However, the point is, we are feeling a real force, just as real as the force that a flea can use to jump 200 times its own

height. *Jin* is linked to the flow of energy in the body and is different from *li*, which is generally defined as gross muscle strength. Soft *jing* is often compared to a whip, which can express a great deal of force in a very short time. When *jing* is used, the muscles stay relatively relaxed as a pulse of energy is released through the body. According to Tai Chi theory, this pulse is created "with tendons and the ends of the muscles, supported by chi."⁹ This statement illustrates a profound understanding of the physiological role of connective tissues that Western science has just begun to uncover.

Traditionally, The Western study of anatomy and physiology used dissection as a primary tool of

investigation. Dissection showed how each part of the body could be separated from the whole, and then each part was given its own name and regarded as a separable independent entity. The science of dissection arose from the ancient and humble art of the butcher, who separated all the parts of an animal into usable parcels and usually cut away the connective tissue from the choice cuts of meat because it was tough and unpalatable. Ironically, Western science too pretty much regarded connective tissue as scrap until recently.¹⁰

Imagine the knowledge that would have emerged if a different approach had been taken and the dissecting knife was used to reveal unity rather than separation? This is exactly the study that researcher and author Thomas W. Myers has conducted to show how human structure is stabilized and moved along certain lines of action he terms "myofascial (myo: muscle tissue + fascia: connective tissue) meridians". Myers' meridians refer to stress/strain lines that distribute the force of tension through the web of connective tissue that surrounds and permeates every part of our bodies. Although based on standard anatomy, Myers work is extremely innovative and explores the



Figure 3

difficult issue of how so many separate body parts can be smoothly and efficiently mobilized to create simultaneous stability and movement within the human body. His quest to find the mechanism of functional unity within human structure has led Myers to identify and reveal through dissection 12 major myofascial continuities* common to the human frame. (Myofascial continuity is the action of one myofascial group flowing into another to provide continuous lines of tension that unify our bodies, providing both support and movement.) Figure 3 diagrams some of the myofascial continuities Myers' describes in his excellent book, *Anatomy Trains*. His book explains how muscles, ligaments, bones, and fascia all work together to create a continuous "organ of form" rather than function as independent structures.¹¹

Myers' meridians of fascial connections spanning our bodies from foot to head provide road maps to fang kai practice, the action of opening and extending centrifugally outwards from the waist area, rather than pushing our Tai Chi postures open with muscle strength.¹² The metaphor of the clam and its shell helps us to understand fang kai. Figure 4 shows the closing action of the transition into the diagonal flying posture, comparing it to the closing action of the clamshell. In the transition posture, the waist area is being stretched open, storing energy in the network of connective tissues in the lumbar area. Then, the energy is released from the waist area through the body to the palm,

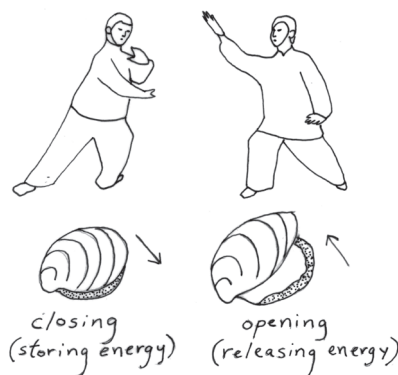


Figure 4

just like the recoil of the connective tissue in the clam's hinge opens its shell when the muscles relax.

Once we have a basic understanding of the energy storing properties of connective tissue and can visualize how our fascial inner net is unified and strengthened by stress/strain patterns, we can appreciate the wisdom within the traditional training methods of Tai Chi:

"All Taijiquan movements are actions of storing and expressing energy in a specific direction with a specific part (or parts) of the body. The key point is to understand that relaxing and storing are the requisite skills necessary to release energy. This is one significant reason why the form is done slowly and deliberately. Once you learn how to relax and store, it is easy to release. So you are actually practicing *fajin* in every form movement. All of the necessary preparation for releasing is there in every form..."¹³

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Moving from External to Internal: A Partner Exercise

By Helen Smeja, M.D.

At our most recent seminar in Montreal in August, 2011, Master Yang Jun spoke about the steps of learning Taijiquan. Learning the movements of the form is the foundation for studying the art. At some point though, one should learn how to connect the external movement to the internal feeling.

In order to get the feeling of “expansion” and “relaxation” throughout the form, Master Yang Jun had us practice an exercise with a partner. He asked us to face our partner and take a comfortable stance, with feet apart. The stance was neither specifically a bow stance nor a horse stance, more of a moderate stance, with our focus on the feeling in the arms rather than on a particular stance. One partner stood with one arm held in a ward-off position (partner A), and the other (partner B), using the palm of each hand, made contact with their partner near the wrist and near the elbow. From that position, partner B would exert a light, bouncy pressure on partner A, seeking from partner A the feeling of pressing on a balloon. While staying connected, partner B would give feedback to partner A to get more relaxed, either by easing on their stiffness if they were too hard or expanding their “limpness” if they were too soft. Partner A would focus on getting the feeling of expansion and “springiness,” with the assistance of the pressure from partner B. This “springiness” is achieved by being relaxed enough, with joints opened and having your tendons feeling extended inside. Though the focus was on partner A to seek out and manifest the “springiness” feeling, both partners should be involved in generating this feeling. You need to find the balance between you and your partner. You don’t want to press too slow or too fast, but you want to give a bit of momentum for your partner to get the feeling. You also want to make sure to stay connected with your partner.

This exercise was used to help us feel Taijiquan’s energy, which Master Yang Jun described as being neither too stiff nor too limp. Applied resistance from a partner was used as one strategy to help us create a unified feeling in our practice. A unified body and unified movement system are at the heart of internal practice.



During the seminar, Master Yang Jun made the following comments about the process of moving from external to internal in the practice of Taijiquan.

“In learning Taijiquan, there are different steps. One begins by learning the external part, which includes movements and postures. With practice, these movements become familiar and you become comfortable with the coordination. Once you have become familiar with the movements, then you can proceed to the next step, where you move your focus from external to internal. This is where you will learn to understand energy. To understand energy, you need to understand for yourself: What is relaxed? How is the energy unified? What can my energy do? Then you need to figure out: What is the energy between me and my opponent? How can my energy be balanced with what my opponent

gives to me?”

“In order for energy to be unified, you first have to learn to be relaxed. What is the relaxed feeling? You can look at it from two points of view. From the philosophical point of view, we ask you to be balanced, to do things in a balanced way. From the energy point of view, you need to be not limp and not stiff; between the two is relaxed. You want the outside to look soft and the inside to be connected or extended. Taijiquan energy is like a spring, a feeling which comes from being relaxed but not being limp. You don’t move on your own, your opponent moves you. Inside, your tendons feel extended, giving your body a feeling of

springiness. During practice, you need to adjust yourself to find the correct feeling. If you practice with a partner, this may help you understand better how you should be. It is good to accept people helping you. This will open other doors for you. People have different personalities. Some find it easier to accept help than others. Confucius said that when three people come together, one of them is your teacher. You can always learn from one another."

"Learning how to be relaxed will help you create the correct energy. From being relaxed, you can create a foundation from which you can learn to be hard, as Yang comes from Yin. How can soft become hard? By being unified; the energy needs to be unified. The energy, from where it comes in from the root, to where it is shown, needs to be coordinated. Where does the energy come from? From two directions: external/physical and internal." "With regards to the external direction, we say the energy comes from the root located in the feet, developed in the legs, controlled by the middle body and shown in the hands. The energy comes from down to up. If the direction of the energy is not correct, this can make it hard to work. If you only use your arms to push, this will not be effective. Your partner may move, but you may also lose balance. The energy comes from the feet, the arms are the last part from which the energy is released or expressed."

"For the internal part, the energy comes from the dantian. The dantian is an area also referred to as the ocean of qi. It is like a storage room. Whatever energy you have is stored in the dantian. When the dantian is strong, the qi is strong. Qi is connected with circulation. Qi, led by the mind, flows through the meridians. Qi is also connected with the lungs. If your breathing method is clear, your mind will be clear. Breathing is a very important method used to neutralize the opponent's energy, as well as to send out energy. When you inhale, you bring your opponent in and when you take them out, you exhale. When do you make your opponent inhale? When you lift up his center; when your opponent is uprooted, he inhales. When you root yourself, you exhale. When your qi is sunk, you can send out energy."

"From Yin/Yang philosophy, if the internal is not correct, the external will feel it. If the external is not correct, the internal will feel it; internal and external need to be unified."

"Another concept is that of force versus energy. From a Western point of view, force comes from muscle. In Chinese, there is a different way to talk about energy and force, with force being quite different from energy. Force is viewed as something rough, with no training and no direction. Energy comes from force with direction and gives a sense of force that is controlled. Force is like iron, whereas energy is more like steel. Energy has direction

and has been trained. You know when and how to use it and it has more direction. Force is more connected with bone. Energy is viewed as coming from the tendons. It is more 'springy' and is not too rough."

"How can you unify the whole body? How can you make the coordination of upper body and lower body? How can you make the coordination from energy storage to the sending out of energy? How can you coordinate internal with external?"

"In order to get unification, these are the requirements:

1. Make the correct body shape. If the body shape is not correct, you will not be able to transfer energy from the lower body to the upper body. Understanding where you want to send the energy and understanding the location of the energy point (for example, the inside of the forearm for the rollback) will help you have the correct body shape.
2. Coordinate internal and external. Having the mind lead the movement is part of the coordination of internal and external.
3. Use the correct method. Energy needs to flow correctly. First you need to store energy, and then you release it, as when you first shift your weight back before you push. After energy is unified, the soft can transform to hard."

"These things will help unify your energy. Use these methods when you practice your form. This will help you nurture your energy. You need to combine Yin practice and Yang practice. If your body never practices Yang, you won't understand it completely. In Yang practice, there is explosion energy. But even when you are sending out energy, your body feels relaxed. You also need to coordinate with the breathing."

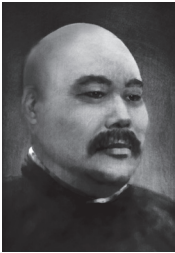
"You need to combine soft and hard. There are yin/yang positions in each movement. If you only practice Yin, your practice will be too flat. You need to manifest yin/yang changes in your practice. You need to have storage and sending out of energy."

The partner exercise Master Yang Jun gave us at the seminar was very helpful. It gives instant feedback and offers a practical and effective way for the partners to work on the feeling of relaxation and experience the feeling of unified energy. This feeling can be brought into form practice. For me, transposing the feeling achieved through the partner exercise to form practice made the form feel more lively and flowing. The movements became smoother. With each movement's opening and closing, with each shift backward and forward, I got the feeling of riding a wave. It also helped make me feel more rooted while practicing the form and more calm, both during and after practice. Try it!



Principles in Practice: Theory and Applications of “Combining Internal and External”

By Adam J. Batten



The Principle of Combining Internal and External (nèi wài xiāng hé):

“What we are practicing in taiji depends on the spirit, hence the saying: ‘The spirit is the general, the body his troops’. If you can raise your spirit, your movements will naturally be light and nimble, the form is nothing more than empty and full, open and closed. When we say ‘open’, we don’t just mean open the arms or legs; the mental intent must open along with the limbs. When we say ‘close’, we don’t just mean close the arms or legs; the mental intent must close along with the limbs. If you can combine inner and outer into a single impulse, then they become a seamless whole.”¹

-Yang Chengfu

This article explores the principle of combining internal and external and seeks to answer some of the following questions: How do we apply this principle to our practice? What does it mean to close and open the mind and body together? How does one combine inner and outer? What follows are some methods I have learned over the years that I hope will motivate you to begin thinking more deeply about this principle.

Yin Practice:

When we begin to learn the hand form, our mind is preoccupied memorizing the 10 principles and 103 movements. In a sense, this is like the body leading the mind. After many months of training we begin to obtain a degree of comfort with the mechanics of the hand form, and we can begin to think about the meanings of the movements. For instance, rollback becomes not merely a shifting of the weight from forward to back while moving the arms from right to left, but a martial application attacking the opponent’s elbow. The strength developed from the hand form training is what enables us to lift the spirit and begin moving with intent, without the distraction of having to constantly think about moving correctly.

The movements will naturally become correct with the help of a good teacher and a good understanding of the 10 principles. The principle of combining internal and external is better understood if we think about the internal and external principles at the preparation of the hand form. The four external principles of lift the head, relax the shoulders and drop the elbows, sink the chest, and relax the waist (lower back) have internal consequences. These include: lifting the spirit, relaxing and calming the mind, and letting the chi sink to the dantian. If the practitioner can master both the external and the internal aspects of the preparation movement then they can radiate a stolid serenity and are well on their way to success in Tai Chi Chuan.

With the strength of the body developed over many months of training providing the foundation we can begin

to develop the martial aspects of Tai Chi Chuan. At this stage it is common for the student to begin learning push hands to develop a sense of how the movements can be applied to an opponent. Personally, I found the push hands training to be essential at this phase of my development. Regardless of whether a student takes up push hands, we can begin to think with martial intent by imagining a shadow opponent whom we seek to engage as we practice the hand form. From the very beginning of the form to the end, if the practitioner imagines they are sparring with an opponent then the mind will automatically lead with purpose. Like a cat focused on its prey, waiting for the right moment to pounce, the mind knows with certainty the fate of the shadow opponent. With the mind focused in this manner the postures become natural and lively.

Yang Practice:

“Standing in yang think about yin, standing in yin think about yang”

-Master Yang Jun

To an observer watching an advanced Tai Chi Chuan practitioner, the hand form seems quite simple. But in reality, the hand form is quite complicated, especially when compared with the yang practice (fajin or explosive energy practice). The 103 postures of the hand form and the many transitions between them have many subtleties and techniques that require many years of daily practice to master. By comparison the yang practice is simple- merely practice one posture repeatedly!

In applying the principle of combining internal and external to yang practice we can reference the quote leading this section. In practicing fajin, whether the point of release is at the shoulder, elbow, palm, hip, or foot, the principles are the same. Continue to imagine an opponent, against whom you are battling, and do not force the energy by overexerting yourself. As in the hand form practice, the mind is calm and relaxed with the body maintaining the essential principles.

It is during this yang practice that one can gain a clearer understanding of the essential aspect of the principle of combining internal and external: the actions of opening and closing. In yang training we link the concepts of opening and closing with the techniques of energy storage and release. Standing meditation can also develop the storing and releasing technique by focusing on the dynamics of a single posture.

For example, consider the difference between Raise Hands Step Forward (tí shǒu shàng shì) and Parting the Wild Horse's Mane (yòu yě mǎ fēn zōng). In Raise Hands Step Forward, the storing of energy occurs when the arms are open and the fajin is released as the arms close. However, during Parting the Wild Horse's Mane the energy is stored when the arms are closing and the fajin is released when the arms open. Though the storage and release of energy happens in opposite positions in these two postures, the technique is the same.

Combining these techniques with the mental aspect we again think of the shadow opponent. Which posture to use and when to store and release energy depends on the location of the opponent. When done correctly, the fajin can be expressed at any distance from the body. This is determined by the mind. Is the opponent near or far, moving quickly or slowly? The mind leads the waist, which in turn leads the body to release the energy into the opponent. After many repetitions, with the mind calm and clear, the mind and body become a seamless whole by knowing and expressing opening and closing instinctively.

Push Hands:

"When practicing with an opponent imagine that there is no opponent."

-Master Yang Jun

In push hands both the internal and external aspects of Tai Chi Chuan are developed. In maintaining the connection with the opponent we are utilizing the sensitivity and vitality of the body. In using our intent to execute the energies we are utilizing the awareness of the mind. By maintaining an indomitable spirit we combine the awareness of the mind and the vitality of the body into a seamless whole. This mind/body combination allows us to easily sense when the opponent is empty or full and to uproot them with a small amount of force

The application of the principle of combining internal and external to push hands is exactly opposite that of the hand form and single posture fajin training. "When practicing with an opponent imagine that there is no opponent." Using this mental technique will allow you to relax, making your movements more fluid and natural. If you are constantly worrying about what your opponent is doing, then you will be unable to focus your energy. Instead of following, sticking and adhering, you will resist, slide or disconnect. Practicing with an opponent while imagining that there is no opponent requires a stolid spirit that is not easily moved. In the maelstrom of battle, imagine you are standing in the eye of the hurricane.

Combining Theory and Practice:

"The motion should be rooted in the feet, released through the legs, controlled by the waist, and manifested through the fingers." ²

-Chang San-Feng

In combining yin/yang theory with Tai Chi Chuan, Master Yang Jun often says the mind is yin and the waist (lower back) is yang. In motion, the spirit maintains an elevated position with the eyes expressing the intent of the application. In the mind/waist dynamic, the mind has decided, but it cannot directly affect the world by thought alone. To exert the entire force of the body requires the circling of the waist leading the body first in the opposite direction, following the opponent's energy and then guiding the body towards the ending position.

Whether we are practicing alone or with a partner, the mind and heart lift the spirit and the spirit is expressed through the eyes. When applying the energy the eyes look in the direction of application, expressing the will of the mind. The physical movements of the body are made deliberately. Without this deliberate intent the movements become sloppy and disconnected. To make the movements lively and focused the spirit must be unperturbed.

The spirit itself is two elements, a physical element (the mind) and a spiritual element (the emotions). The physical element is the mechanics of the way you move. The spiritual element is the way you feel when you move. For example, when you see someone who is skilled and has a strong spirit, you know that he is good and strong because of the feeling you get when you see him. Similarly, when you see someone who is sloppy and careless in their movements you can feel his carelessness. A good, strong spirit can be cultivated in Tai Chi Chuan by simply maintaining the first principle: slightly lifting the top of the head. During practice it is the spirit and mind that lead the motions of the body and in turn these motions naturally guide the chi and refined energies through the body. With the correct understanding of yin and yang, the energy will flow naturally.

In the solo practice, the correct understanding of the principle of combining internal and external comes from imagining a shadow opponent, "standing in yin think of yang". With the spirit elevated and the mind focused on the application of opening and closing, the waist guides the energy of the entire body to disrupt the opponent's attacks. In push hands, the correct understanding of combining internal and external comes from imagining no opponent, "standing in yang think of yin." With the spirit unperturbed by the movements of the opponent, the body can change effortlessly from empty to full, allowing the body to respond with ease to the movements of the opponent. Whether in solo practice or push hands, the mind and spirit lead internally and the waist leads externally.

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Practice Pages



Prepare

Feet point straight, shoulder width apart. Holding the sword with the left hand, it touches the left forearm, lightly. The right hand, palm open, is set by the side of the body. Body posture follows the Principles from the Hand Form.



Opening

Rotate and lift up your arms. Turn your palms facing out and form the sword fingers with right hand.



Lift up your arms to shoulder level.



Close arms to shoulder width apart at shoulder level. Sword touches left forearm.



Push down your arms "almost to the bottom". Right sword fingers, palm facing down follow the push down. Keep the sword touching left forearm.



Shift your weight slightly to the left and turn the body, setting the right foot at 45°.

太極劍



Draw the arms back, leading with the elbows.



When the elbows are to the side of the body, open them sideways.



Both forearms circle down and rotate open to the side. The sword rotates as well, so it is under your arm during the movement.



Shifting to the right, sit your center down. At the same time, rotate both arms: right arm sword fingers turn up and left arm rotates to the side.



Left arm circles up then pushes down to the front of your body. Right arm circles down to the right at 45°. At the same time, step out with left foot forming the bow stance.



Shift your weight forward, turning body to the left. Left arm makes a big circle from right to front while right arm follows the body rotation and draws in. Sit your sword fingers in front of your right shoulder.





As you move forward, turn the body square. At the same time, right arm and sword fingers point straight ahead. Left arm sits beside your hip. Keep sword in the vertical position.



Shift weight back slightly, bringing your left arm slightly up.



With the body turning, open your left foot to 45°. At the same time, rotate and circle your right arm to the right side diagonal position (less than corner) with palm diagonally facing up. The left arm bends in, sitting the left palm. Left and right palms face each other. Keep sword touching the left forearm.



Left foot steps out to form the bow stance. At the same time, rotate your right arm and open your sword fingers. Left arm bends in.



Circle the Moon with Three Rings

Moving forward, bend your left knee while the left arm closes in with forearm straight. Right palm circles in while closing and touches sword handle. Keep sword in contact with left forearm.

太極劍



Move forward and take a narrow step with the right foot (center line/two sides) open at 45°. At the same time, right arm circles to the left, in the front, while the left arm circles to the right, in the back. The arms cross in front of the body.



Continue moving forward, circle the left arm out - pommel pointing outward at the center line of the body. Right arm sits to the side of the right hip with weight on the right leg.



Right hand grabs sword handle and then sets the sword straight up in front of the right shoulder. Change the left hand to the sword fingers, pointing to the right forearm. At the same time, the left foot turns in 45°.



Right foot steps in with toes facing the right corner. Shifting back, circle the sword down toward the right side of the body with left sword fingers following, keep the palm facing down.



The sword continues circling back.





Keep circling back and turn the wrist, rotating the sword.



The right arm sinks down, the sword cuts up until it is vertical. Bring your left foot in slightly and touch with the ball of your foot. The coordination needs to be clear: when the sword becomes vertical, left arm arrives at the front of the body and the left foot steps in.



Sword chops to the right back corner, in line with the right arm, slightly lower than the shoulder. Left arm follows right arm with sword fingers sitting in front of the body.



Sink the right arm and bring the sword vertical.



Rise up on the right leg. The sword and left arm circles up and to the left while lifting up the left leg.

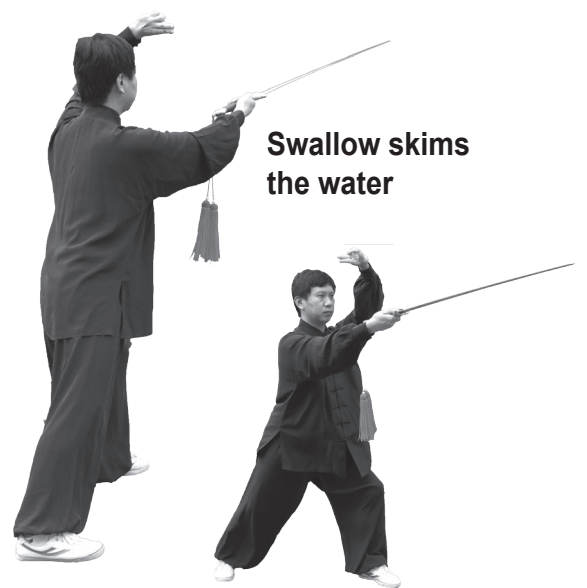


The Big Dipper

Continue to rise up until the right leg is naturally straight. The sword pokes out to the front. The right arm is naturally straight, keeping the sword horizontal. Left sword fingers point up at shoulder level. At the same time, pick up the left leg with knee pointing forward, toes pointing down.



Sinking down, the left foot steps out to the left side corner forming a bow stance. At the same time, gradually change the sword from vertical to horizontal as the left arm circles out to "ward-off" upward.



Swallow skims the water

Following the waist rotation, lead the sword from down to up towards the left corner and complete the "ward-off" with the left arm above the head. At the same time, turn your right foot straight to finish the bow stance. The sword is in line with the right arm, with the tip about head level.



Taijiquan Wen Da: Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang Answers Five Questions

By Dave Barrett

Translated by Master Yang Jun



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang was born in 1945 and began his study of Taijiquan when he was seven years old. He is the son of Chen Zhaoxu and the grandson of Chen Fake. Initially trained by his father, his main teachers were his uncles Chen Zhaokui and Chen Zhaopei. During his teenage years his family endeavored to re-establish the traditional training methods of the previous 18 generations.

Working as farmers by day and training long hours every night, gradually the 19th generation of Chen Style martial artists emerged. Along with Wang Xian, Zhu Tiancai and Chen Zhenglei, Chen Xiaowang has earned fame as one of “The four tigers of Chenjiagou”. From 1980 to 1982 he won three national tournaments in a row and in 1985 was Grand Champion of the 1st International Wushu Competition held in Xian.¹ Since then he has travelled and taught internationally and authored three books on Taijiquan. Recently returned to China from Australia, he continues his teaching and training in Chenjiagou.

Grandmaster Chen has formulated a fascinating analysis of the development of Taijiquan skills, delineating five levels of accomplishment. To set the stage for his remarks, I have excerpted his commentary from Howard Choy and Ahtee Chia’s article, “Master Chen Xiaowang’s Five Levels of Skill in Tai Chi Training”.²

Level One: Form and Posture

“Correct posture forms the foundation of tai chi chuan. This is necessary before the *chi* can flow properly...Do not aim for perfection. Your tai chi form will be angular and disconnected. This is normal for a beginner...This stage is said to be one yin and nine yang. It is like a pole that is poked into the ground. Being shallow and lacking a proper base, it is easily pushed over.”

Level Two: Chi Flow

“At this level you will begin to feel the movement of the intrinsic *chi*...Your posture will need to be adjusted in order for you to gain proper coordination of the body and eliminate all contradictions of purpose, to gain unity of the internal with the external...During the first level you

will feel that you are making rapid progress. However, at the transition from the first to second level, you will feel that you are not making progress at all. Your *chi* flows sometimes and not at other times...At this stage it is easy to feel discouraged and frustrated, and you may even give up. A strong determination and persistence is required. What you need to do is reexamine your form; go back to the principles. Correct your posture and move the whole body as a unit. When one part of the body moves, the whole body moves...Your *chi* will start to flow and you will understand how to use it. Your confidence will increase, and your tai chi will start to become more interesting... This level is two yin and eight yang—still incomplete and uncoordinated.”

Level Three: Moving from a Large Circle to a Medium Circle

“Circle implies not just the movements of the hands and feet, but also the internal *chi* movement...Third-level training is the transition from big circle to medium circle. The *Classics* say, “Where the mind goes, the chi goes and the body follows.”...At this stage you must not just concentrate on the *chi* flow and neglect the external movements. There must be a synthesis of body and mind; otherwise the *chi* will not flow freely...Work on gaining a better understanding of the martial application of the movements. Do more push hands training, fine-tune your posture, understand how to express your *jin*, how to deflect and change your energy flow and increase your intrinsic *chi*...This level is said to be three yin and seven yang. Your skills are not altogether proper.”





Level Four: Moving from a Medium Circle to a Small Circle

“At this level you move from the medium circle to the small circle. This is quite an advanced level. You are very close to ultimate success. The martial application is even more important at this stage...When you practice the form, imagine that you are surrounded by attacks, but when you fight, imagine that there is no one around so that your movements are swift and natural and you will maintain your composure...Your posture is now stable, and you are not easily defeated in push-hands. You can deflect the other’s energy with subtle body movements and can change direction and energy in rhythm with the changes in direction and energy of your opponent...This stage is said to be four yin and six yang—you are now an accomplished martial artist”

Level Five: Moving from a Small Circle to No Circle

“From form to formless. Your movements are now alive and coordinated, your internal *jin* is full, and you seek excellence within excellence. A day’s work is a day’s achievement. You can change endlessly, and your energy is invisible. Internally, there is movement between the substantial and the insubstantial, but externally no movement or change is visible...This level is said to be five yin and five yang—perfect balance. Your yin and yang is continuous without end; when you move, it is in harmony with the tai chi principles, so everything is possible. You have gained mastery of the body and the mind. Your mind is tranquil and calm, and even when you are attacked suddenly, your equipoise is undisturbed. There is no limit to your tai chi development, and the ultimate goal seems attainable.”

Why is Taijiquan described as an internal martial art?

The Chinese Martial Arts Association has identified approximately 130 types of martial arts. Every martial art has internal and external aspects but broadly speaking, we can distinguish internal and external as two approaches to training. External martial arts focus on striking with the fists

but they also include the requirement of gradually uniting the external techniques with the movement of internal energy.

Internal martial arts begin with stillness (*Wuji*) and expand into motion (*Taiji*). From the dantian we connect the *Qi* flow to all parts of the body, unifying the whole body. For example, how do we create the root in our footwork? Is the energy from the foot? Actually we send *Qi* from the dantian to the ground and when it rebounds up, then the energy is produced correctly. What makes a car go forward? Is it the tires turning or the engine that turns the tires? The energy from the dantian creates our motions. We start our motions internally; this is the main distinction between internal and external martial arts. We connect our source of power by relaxing the waist, creating a unified body feeling. Our power is rooted in the feet, flows through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed to the tip. If we use explosive energy (*Fajin*), it can be sent anywhere, palm, elbow, or shoulder.

What is the tip? If we release *Fajin* using the elbow, the elbow is the tip; the shoulder, hip, back, knee, chest or palm: all of these are tips. The whole body, everywhere, is a fist and can deliver a punch. We can release explosive energy in any position, to any part of the body. If the *Qi* is not gathered at the core/source, it is difficult to send it out correctly. You may think you are sending it out but the tip remains empty.

External martial arts start from the outside but in the end they also must successfully combine with the internal energy. Internal martial arts start from the inside but need to connect with the external tip. Both of these approaches result in the internal and external combining together. However, there is a difference. For example, if you plant bean seeds, you get beans. Plant melon seeds and you’ll get melons. Every martial art has specific techniques and results, some better than others. Some turn in circles, others emphasize straight forward and back methods. The long and short of it is that success is measured by the balance of combined energies.



In your experience as a teacher, how is the internal developed in Chen Style?

In 1993 I went to teach in Japan and my students there asked me why my motions were different from their teacher? They were expecting me to criticize this difference. My feeling is that if I did this, their practice foundation would be torn apart. Of course that teacher’s practice was different from mine, if they were the same I wouldn’t have to come and teach. Afterwards I kept thinking about this

question. When I visited New York I asked five students to write the words “New York”, then I shuffled these pages and held them up asking, “Who wrote this one? Who



wrote that one?" They all wrote down "New York" but could tell by their handwriting which was which. It's like this: even though we have the same practice, everyone is slightly different. Different body shapes, different mental processes, everyone is different. Practicing Taijiquan is like handwriting; these differences are not a problem. Even teachers may have slight differences, again, not a big problem. There are many roads into New York City, which one you take is not as important as actually arriving in New York City. Taijiquan is like this. Our goal is the same: to create a unified movement system, using the complete body. It must begin at the core and connect every part together. If any link is broken you will lose your balance. If it is unified, no matter what technique your opponent uses, the foundation will be strong and the system continuous. If you can maintain this unity, you can let the opponent in and lead them to emptiness by breaking their structure. It doesn't take much skill to punch someone; everyone knows how to do that. Our practice is to develop this coordinated moving system.

In developing this gongfu it's natural at the beginning to have inaccurate positions and inconsistent motions. Your internal energy circulation is weak. Gradually your Qi circulation will strengthen as you correct these mistakes and your Taijiquan improves. For example, when I was young I'd practice the Old Frame seven or eight times, I'd get very tired, sometimes unable to practice. If I did ten repetitions, very tired! The year before last, I did the Old Frame twenty times and then did the Cannon Fist and I wasn't even thirsty. Why? I'm getting old and I'm not as strong as when I was thirty. Why can I now practice twenty repetitions and still not get tired? Now that my motions are more accurate I am using less physical strength, consuming less energy. If you drive a beat-up clunker of a car, your gas mileage is very poor. Drive a nice new Japanese car, very quiet, well engineered and designed, your mileage is much better. When you're young you may be very strong but move inefficiently, consuming a lot of energy. By refining the inaccuracies and increasing the efficiency of my motions I'm now conserving energy. Be clear about what is inaccurate in your motions and gradually refine them, making them more exact.

There are five levels in developing this gongfu. Begin with accurate form practice, this is elementary. Sometimes you may have sensations, sometimes not. As you progress, it's not just a step one to step two process. No one can really

progress in this fashion, it's natural to make progress and then lose ground. You may have some mistakes but you can still move ahead. Here you need a teacher's help. Without this this assistance you might get stuck in the first two levels. At the third level you begin to have some control over your motions, understanding the movement system. Your comprehension improves and your mistakes decrease. At the first level your interest is in learning the movement. During the second level you begin to feel the energy but it's not always there. Perhaps when you are pushing hands you cannot use it, and when you go back to form practice you have lost it. Some people drop out altogether at this point. It doesn't happen in one day. This level takes a long time to unify the body's feeling with the internal energy. You must keep repeating, keep practicing and the quality of feeling will gradually change. From quantity to quality, this is the method. The external reaches in to the internal and the internal reaches out to the external. At this point you can feel if the internal flow is broken and then you can begin to correct the external inaccuracies to unite the energy with the motions. We say that, "within three years you can experience small



success, within nine years, a great success." Back in the day of my great-grandfather, Chen Gengyun, they practiced all the time. He was of the same generation as Yang Luchan and hired out as a security guard for a shipping merchant. One time a shipment was stuck for three years in one location and so was my great-grandfather. During that time he practiced constantly, resting only in a chair. When he returned to

Chenjiagou, his bedroll was untouched and perfectly clean. This saying comes from that era. Of course, now times are different and without proper instruction you could practice for 10 years and have no success!

At the third level you begin to grasp the methods and even without a teacher you can make progress by yourself. The fourth level brings greater stability and subtlety to the moving system. There is no fixed point of completion at the fifth level. The more you understand, the farther the boundary is extended. There is no limit to achievement. The motions are completely natural, and the responses to an opponent are unpredictable, spontaneous and unconsciously ingenious.

Can you recall any specific instructions from your teachers that helped you discover the internal?

You know, studying within the family is different from ordinary teaching. Actually it is quite simple. If you are not



quite right, the correction is given through contact. Your movements, form and hand shapes are all tested through touch. “Can you feel this? Do you know why it should be like this?” This is the traditional teaching method. During push hands if you make a mistake you get hit! “Do you get it now?” If you’d fail to make the correction, wham, you would get hit again! “How about now?” It’s like this. There’s not much to say, but plenty to feel. They wanted me to feel the techniques, not discuss them. In the past people practiced more and thought less. Today people are thinking more and practicing less. There was not a lot of explanation. When Zhaokui would demonstrate he wouldn’t talk, he would show us. Then he would test us. “Do you feel this? Was it too hard? Too soft?” We were all very interested in learning this, so it didn’t seem like hard work. These traditional techniques are experienced, not analyzed by the teacher for the student’s benefit. My teachers corrected my forms but more importantly they made me feel their energy. Language cannot accurately express these things, feeling them is better.



What is the most important thing for students to focus on in discovering the internal aspects of Taijiquan?

This is an important question. The problem is this: if you focus on one aspect you forget the other points. If you only concentrate on here, you forget there. This problem affects many students. The rules and principles need to complement the natural ability of the student, but by

concentrating too much on these rules you lose sight of natural instincts. If you want to make a square or a circle you need a ruler or a compass. The principles are these tools. Many people are limited by using these tools, forgetting the feel of natural motion. For example, this is why Hsing-I goes back to learn from the monkey, rooster or tiger. The animals’ minds are not limited by anything. The human mind is restricted by all these details and requirements to the detriment of our natural instincts. In practicing Taijiquan it is important to maintain a natural feeling first and then apply the rules. This will help you create the unified system. Make sure the rules don’t limit you. Hold the natural feeling at the center of your practice. Perhaps I’m being too serious about this but I feel if you practice for ten years like a machine, it’s better not to practice at all. I see this as one of the major mistakes made in practicing Taijiquan.

As a Grandmaster, is there anything else you would like to say to Taijiquan students?

Even though we may practice different styles, the important thing is to understand how to unify the body and the motions into a coordinated system. Pay attention to your natural ability.

It is commonly said that many people practice Taijiquan. From my perspective, it is actually only a very small percentage, maybe one tenth of one percent that actually practices. It is difficult to find a qualified teacher. This is why the percentage is so low. So many people don’t study Taijiquan. We need to develop new teachers. We need to emphasize educational outreach and development, to bring new people into our practice.



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Searching for the Internal

*“Doing the form is just the surface. It is not enough.
You need to search for the internal.”*

Yang Zhenduo¹

By Ed Boates

*“Anyone interested in adopting a principle or structural point is capable of inventing an appropriate feeling image to aid this effort. You simply need to make up an image that evokes qualities that are aligned to that particular principle.” Peter Ralston*²

I have been practicing the internal art of Tai Chi Chuan conscientiously since the summer of 1984. During the 1990's, I attended seven summer seminars with Masters Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun, which are fondly remembered today as among the most memorable and significant experiences of my life.

Yang Family Style Tai Chi Chuan forms the core of my internal arts practice. I complement it with neigong sets, Taoist meditation, Bagua circle walking and weight training. During my years of training, I have been both subconsciously and consciously engaged in an ongoing search for the internal. In response to Peter Ralston's quote, I have created a series of “feeling images” to enhance and expedite the embodiment of fundamental internal principles into my practice. I initially practiced with eight feeling images, but in the last couple of years, I have expanded this to twelve for a more complete practice. I have divided these images into six structural images and six functional images. This article focuses on the structural images

The images that I use are suggestive and descriptive, rather than exhaustive or definitive. The great thing about feeling images is that they are both customizable and portable. They can be customized to suit individual needs, and many of them can be practiced during the regular routines of daily life. For example, holding the head “as if suspended from above,” can enhance good posture in all movements.

Master T. T. Liang wrote a fascinating book called *Imagination Becomes Reality*. A constant theme in his instructions to his students was to consistently imagine the Tai Chi principles they were attempting to embody, until they became an experiential reality. Likewise, these images are initially visualized and imagined, but must eventually be embodied as kinesthetic experiences. The creative use of imagery is found throughout the Tai Chi Chuan classics: *“In stillness be like a great mountain; in movement like a mighty river.”*³

1. The Tai Chi Tensegrity Sphere

“The Tai Chi diagram represents a dynamic three-dimensional sphere, not a circle in a plane as it is regularly depicted. The purpose of Tai Chi Chuan is to train the

*individual to become like a dynamic Tai Chi or rotating sphere which for the martial arts, is the most balanced and beautiful of all shapes. A basic feature of training in Tai Chi Chuan is that one learns to think of oneself as a sphere with the Tan-tien as the center” Jou Tsung Hwa*⁴

*“Taijiquan and other Internal Arts are constantly presenting opportunities to feel the power of Tensegrity. You do this by extending your limbs and relaxing into the extensions.” Rick Barrett*⁵

A dedicated and disciplined Tai Chi player ultimately wants to experience and embody the kinesthetic awareness of being suspended, centered and grounded, both statically and dynamically. This challenging process begins with the first structural image: The Tai Chi (Tensegrity) Sphere. The total body and mind is visualized and imagined as a three-dimensional sphere. Body and mind is emphasized, because one must use the hsin or heart/mind to cultivate this 360 degrees of spherical awareness. Tensegrity is a concept that is currently being employed in contemporary Tai Chi practice and study.

Buckminster Fuller, the brilliant and innovative architect coined the term Tensegrity. Tensegrity or tensional integrity, is a term used to describe a structure composed of discontinuous compression elements connected by a continuous tensional network of cables (think tendons), which co-ordinate and interact in a superbly dynamic fashion. Fuller's magnificent geodesic domes manifest the qualities of flexibility and strength, two desirable traits found in a Tai Chi player's Tensegrity sphere.

At first glance, one assumes that in a human body the bones would represent the discontinuous elements and the living matrix of the connective tissue system (tendons, ligaments, muscles and fascia) the continuous system. It would seem without the connective tissue matrix, we would simply be a pile of bones. However, according to the experts, bones have both compressive and tensile potential.

For our purposes, the Tai Chi sphere can be viewed as a three dimensional tensional network. The next five structural images will outline some of the core components of the Tai Chi sphere.

2. The Sky Hook

*“The first point deals with the requirement for the head. It says: “An unsubstantial energy leads to the top of the head.” The Chinese call it “Xu ling ding jin”. If we examine the Chinese characters literally it means “The insubstantial (empty) spirit extending energy to the top”. Yang Zhen Duo*⁶

"First, when your head is up you feel physically like you are taller, maybe one cun (width of the thumb knuckle). One inch is too much, it will make you feel stiff. One cun is probably the correct feeling. Also, I want you to feel "ling", "xu ling" like you have a hook on your head and something is pulling up. Pull your head up and feel the rest of you sinking downward." Yang Jun ⁷

In an effort to embody this principle, I use the image of the sky hook. The hook is at the end of a chain hanging down from the sky and attached to the Bai Hui point at the crown of the head or top of the Tai Chi sphere. The sky hook lifts the head up slightly, less than an inch, as Master Yang Jun suggests, so that there is a subtle, gentle but distinct separation between the occiput and the atlas, the first of the seven cervical vertebrae. This structural image creates the sensation of being suspended from above. It also significantly enhances the spirit of vitality and alleviates any possible compression in the cervical vertebrae. Bruce Frantzis says, "The Chinese liken this to lifting a hat off a coat rack." ⁸

Master Jou Tsung Hwa felt that if he could live to be at least 100 years of age, then people might finally give serious attention to his teachings. So, he reportedly asked 102 year old Master Wu Tunan the secret of his longevity. The response he received was, "Hold your head as if suspended above!"

3. The Axis (the Axle):

According to Taoist tradition the central channel, the core energy, is the most important energetic pathway in the body. This line of energy runs vertically, directly through the center of the body. A cut directly down the central axis of the body would bisect the energy core, which goes from the center of the head right down through the perineum and then continues through the center of the bone marrow of the arms and legs. This central vertical core of energy is the original energetic source of the formation of the human body from conception onward manifesting in the development of the spine, the arms and legs." Bruce Frantzis ⁹

The *zhong mai*, or central channel, is located at the extreme center and absolute core of the Tai Chi sphere. Therefore "strengthening the core" in neigong, Tai Chi, and Taoist meditation has a more internal meaning that it does in other modes exercise where "strengthening the core" is concentrated in the area of the waist and hips.

I use the images of the axis and the axle for the central channel. These terms are synonymous and interchangeable. However, technically speaking, the axle describes the structure of the central channel and the axis its functional potential. Axle means "a rod or spindle (either fixed or rotating) on which a wheel or group of wheels is fixed."

The axis begins at the *bai hui* point at the crown of the head, descends down the center of the body to the heart. At the heart it diverges and ascends slightly in a diagonal direction to each arm. And from there it passes through

the bone marrow of the arms, eventually reaching the fingertips. It then descends from the heart, passing through the dantian to the *hui yin* (perineum) and then branches laterally to each *kwa* (hip joint) passing through the bone marrow of the legs to the tips of the toes.

As an initial practice to familiarizing yourself with the axis, try the following exercise. Close your eyes and with your "mind's eye" trace these pathways. As a second practice, starting from above the head or at the *bai hui* point, inhale energy down the pathways of the axis, try to feel the energy reaching your fingertips and toes.

Ultimately, Yang Chengfu's tenth principle "tranquility in movement" must be sought and discovered within the internal space of the axis or central channel. Therein lies a lifetime of meditation practice.

4. The Hub

"Your lower tantien is located down from your navel about one-third of the distance to your genitals, just slightly above your pubic hair, in the center of your abdomen, midway between the surface of the skin of your belly and your spine, on the central channel. It is the only energetic center in your body that controls and regulates every energy that affects your physical health. You want to find this place in your body by feeling for it rather than visualizing it. This energy center has an initially fuzzy and eventually clear sensation, distinct from everything around it. It may be felt either as a tiny point or a small ball. The tantien is the center of a sea of energy." Bruce Frantzis ¹⁰

"We could feel as if there is a sphere in the center of the body perhaps golf ball size (or something a bit larger or smaller depending on what feels best) and feel as if the sphere turns and moves our whole body around which will give us a better sense of moving from the center" Peter Ralston ¹¹

In Tai Chi theory, the lower *tantien* is considered almost to be like a "second brain". The *tantien* is a "field of elixir" or "sea of energy" at the absolute center of the body, on the central channel. Thus in coordination with the axle, the *tantien* is at the "hub" of all the energetic and kinetic activity manifested by the whole body of the Tai Chi sphere. Hub is defined as "the central part of a wheel rotating on or with the axle".

The Hub is about the size of a golf ball and has the *yin/yang* symbol emblazoned on it, reflecting its circling and spiralling potentials. In addition, it has a chain attached to it that descends through the *hui yin* (perineum) at the base of the torso and is connected to the anchor below the ground. The movement of the anchor is directly synchronized by the hub.

Tai Chi practitioners are constantly encouraged to "sink the chi to the *tantien*" or "abide by the *tantien*". Essentially this means to keep at least part of their awareness in the area called the hub Master Jou Tsung Hwa suggests that this awareness should be maintained even during sleep.¹² This concentrated awareness aids in the lowering of the center of gravity, assists the cultivation of chi and calms the mind.



5. The Foot Nails

"These three nails play different roles: The big toe is like a trim-tab on a rudder, it leads the actions. In Chinese medical charts there is a little brain that appears on the big toe of the foot, I call it the brain nail. The ball of the foot provides power and I call it the energy nail. The heel is like an anchor and I call it the anchor nail. The anchor nail serves to hold the entire body weight; it stabilizes your structure and controls your height, it helps you stay on the same level when practicing Tai Chi movements." William C.C. Chen¹³

When I first encountered William C.C. Chen's idea of the foot nails, I immediately thought of embellishing it into foot spikes. Athletes in many sports (baseball, football, track and field, golf) wear shoes with spikes during competition. I also considered the image the foot screwing into the ground, which would also accommodate the feeling of pivoting on the heel or ball of the foot.

Out of respect for Master Chen, the source of the original idea, I have adopted the image of the foot nails. The Tai Chi player's foot nails, although imaginary, have the capacity to instantly activate or retract as directed by the mind's intent. My use of the foot nails imagery is basic and rudimentary, nowhere near the sophistication of Master Chen's application of them. For me, each foot has seven nails: one on the bottom of each toe, one at the ball of the foot in front of the Bubbling Well point, and one in the center of the heel. Each of these nails is like a mini-anchor magnetically attracted to the anchor below the ground.

6. The Anchor

"For example, if you want to work on grounding, you could imagine a very large lead ball, say a thousand pounds, hanging under the floor and attached to your centre with a chain. Through practicing such an exercise you will immediately become more grounded and structurally sound. If you train this way for a few years, at some point you will be able to find the principle in the same powerful way without any imagery at all. One of the great things about training such feeling images is that you can do it almost anywhere and at any time. This convenience is helpful since you must practice diligently for some time before the change becomes real and lasting." Peter Ralston¹⁴

The anchor is visualized as a thousand pound demolition ball hanging below the ground. The anchor is attached directly to the hub by a chain. The anchor has the Tai Chi symbol emblazoned on it, and most importantly in conjunction with some of the other feeling images, imagine it as highly magnetized. During the practice of the form, the anchor will move forward and back, up and down, and in circular and spiral motions, all directly controlled by and coordinated with the hub.

The cultivation of the anchor image is instrumental in generating the feeling of rootedness and grounding in the Tai Chi Sphere. Personally, I find the anchor to be the most difficult of the structural images to employ.

The images are ideally practiced in a standing posture, but could also be achieved sitting on a chair with your feet flat on the floor. During the first five minutes of my warm-up before form practice, I stand and focus on these images, touching base with each of them. I then endeavour to maintain these six images during form practice.

I hope that with persistent and imaginative practice these images will ultimately enable the Tai Chi practitioner to feel that their forms are suspended, centered and rooted.

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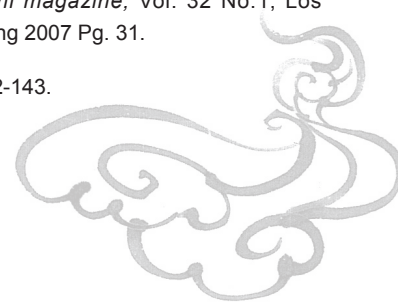
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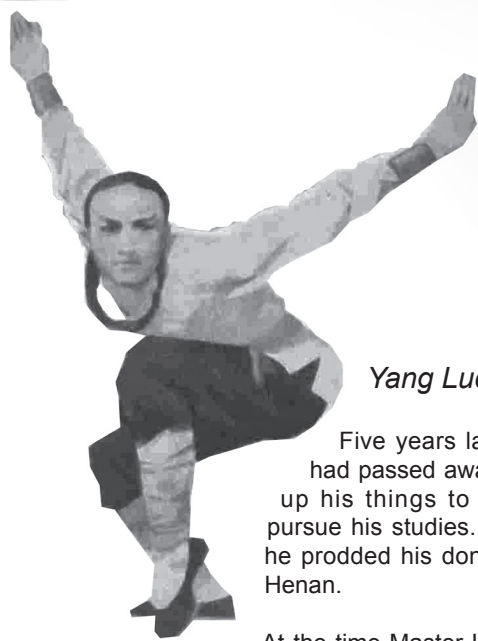
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Stealing Boxing

By Gong Baiyu

Chapter 2

*Going to Henan to seek a master,
Yang Luchan breaks the rules by watching a training session*

Five years later, now that his father had passed away, Yang Luchan packed up his things to leave on a journey to pursue his studies. Leaving his hometown, he prodded his donkey as he journeyed to Henan.

At the time Master Liu Ligong closed up the school and returned home in retirement, Yang Luchan had accompanied him along the way and chatted during the evenings to ask about the journey. Master Liu knew in his heart that although his favorite disciple was young, he was quite determined for one still so green. Even though he was smart, once he crossed over into the Jianghu* world, his lack of experience would be a problem. Master Liu, showing his kindness, shared with Yang Luchan much of the experience he had gained over many decades, telling him more or less what things you needed to know, what rules you needed to follow, and what you needed to pay attention to in the Jianghu world. Yang Luchan took his words to heart. After Master Liu left, Yang Luchan had wanted to leave home to further his studies, but had married not long before and had lost his parents, so he delayed five years before fulfilling his long cherished wish and setting out on his journey.

Yang Luchan was travel-worn and weary. After walking more than ten days, he crossed the border into Huaiqing. He took lodging at an inn, had some food and some tea, but didn't feel sleepy yet. He walked out into the courtyard of the inn under the moonlight and began thinking, "I've almost arrived at Chen Village. How can I show my sincerity and become a disciple? How can I prove my aspirations? How can I make Chen Qingping accept me? Maybe I should first tell him what I have learned in the past and get Master Chen to think well of me as a young man with aspirations."

Deep in thought, he went on planning, walking to and fro in the courtyard. At times, he lifted his head to look at the moon; sometimes he dropped his head to consider his shadow. By now, all the guests in the inn had retired, and the sounds gradually began to die down. There were only a few rooms of people who had not yet gone to sleep and whose voices could still be heard indistinctly.

Suddenly, there were loud noises coming from another courtyard, sometimes rising and sometimes falling. Yang Luchan pricked up his ears to figure out what it was. It seemed to be the sound of weapons clashing as they came into contact. This suited his inclinations, and so piqued his interest. Unconsciously, he moved closer. As

he searched for the sound, he realized that it was coming from a courtyard to the east. There was a tiny gate with one panel unlatched. As he drew closer and stood next to it, he could hear clearly that there were people talking about martial arts training and techniques.

Yang Luchan was just a young man from a respectable family, so he did not understand the taboos of the Jianghu world. That sound was like a magnet drawing him towards it. Even though he was smart, he did a foolish thing. Without saying a word, he stepped inside the gate.

There was a square-shaped yard that was almost forty yards wide. In the moonlight, under the east wall was an old master who looked to be over forty. He was brandishing a saber and making some cleaving and chopping motions. Standing in front of him were a handful of young students listening to his explanations. On the other side of the yard were seven or eight young men in light suits, all holding sabers, spears, and staffs while they practiced.

The gate creaked. The sound made the students drop their weapons. They froze and turned as one to look at Yang Luchan. The old teacher also stilled his saber. He turned his head.

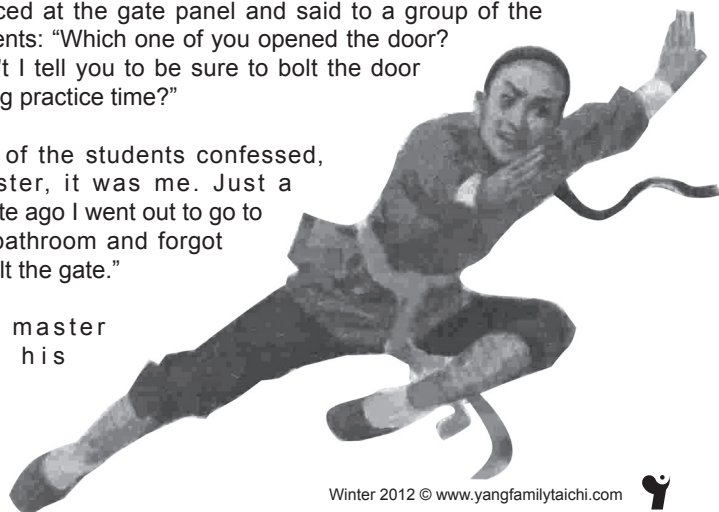
"What do you want?"

Yang Luchan now realized that he had committed a blunder and quickly bowed, saying: "I'm so sorry to disturb you! I'm a guest at the inn and..." he said as his voice trailed off.

The master looked Yang Luchan up and down. Although he was twenty years old, he looked more like a teenager. The master said: "Oh? What room are you in? It's almost midnight. What are you doing up and around?" He also glanced at the gate panel and said to a group of the students: "Which one of you opened the door? Didn't I tell you to be sure to bolt the door during practice time?"

One of the students confessed, "Master, it was me. Just a minute ago I went out to go to the bathroom and forgot to bolt the gate."

The master
and his



students were there in the yard, about a dozen people, all looking upset. Yang Luchan couldn't help feeling ashamed and said, "I'm sorry. I'm in room number 9. Tonight, I couldn't get to sleep, and I heard the sounds of your practice. I found myself feeling inquisitive and rashly walked in to see what all the commotion was about. Master, please do not be angry. Everyone, please continue with your practice."

The master gave Yang Luchan another look and saw that he was skinny and frail, not like someone wanting to issue a challenge. Then he turned around and said to his students, "He is a guest of the hotel, young, an outsider, and doesn't know the rules. Just go ahead and practice now."

Some of the young students continued their practice as before, but there were two who were still angrily sizing up Luchan.

So far, Yang Luchan couldn't walk out, but had no wish to stay. His discomfort showed in his face. The master, however, called Luchan to his side.

"From your accent, it sounds like you come from north of the Yellow River. May I ask what is your surname?"

"I come from Hebei Province, Guangping Prefecture. My surname is Yang. May I ask, Master, for your surname?"

"My surname is Mu, and my full name is Mu Hongfang. I'm the one who runs the inn. I've loved to practice martial arts since I was young. Since I never met a famous teacher, I don't have any skill. However my neighbors, friends, and relatives in the village all know I love to practice and forced me to start teaching. There are no outsiders among these disciples of mine. They are all either my young Hui relatives or my friends' children. Whatever I teach, right or wrong, they all bear with me. Luckily, their goal is to make their bodies strong and not to gain fame by practicing martial arts. Otherwise, I wouldn't dare waste their time to teach them. I told them long ago, if anyone comes to challenge us, we will close down."

At this moment, he smiled at Luchan. "Allow me to be direct, Xiao Xiong Di (Little Brother), when you hastily rushed in here, we were all thinking you came to issue a challenge. After you explained you were my guest, I, Mu Hongfang, could not say anything else. Xiao Xiong Di, I'm going to say something that may not make you very happy. When you're traveling away from home, you need to be more cautious. The practice yard is a place for making friends, but it can also be a place to start trouble. If you don't plan to take the floor, it's best not to come here, even if you know martial arts and plan to use it to find friends. Let's imagine, here I have a practice yard, and I teach a bunch of students. If I lose a challenge to someone, do you think I can still teach? So, when the master meets someone who crosses the floor, that is the day he must decide to put life and death on the line. But, if you don't know martial arts, would you be welcome in the yard? It's

not quite the same. You're welcome. A guest at this inn like you, young man, who gets a little bored and likes watching people practice martial arts, could ask the hotel clerk who set up this yard and then ask him to bring you here. That way, there would be no problem. I don't mean to be going on and on, but you are young and impetuous. If I weren't here and these students said something inconsiderate, would you listen or not? I don't mean to lecture you. You like martial arts and seem to know something. All martial arts are one family, like thousands of peach flowers that all come from one tree. What do you know? Show me a little bit. This doesn't count as a challenge." He bowed to Luchan.



"Please come down and show us something."

Yang Luchan's face flushed with embarrassment. He never imagined that his little venture would end up teaching him such a lesson. He thought to himself that he had to blame his inexperience and that he would have to grow from the experience. At this moment, Mu Hongfang called him to the floor. Luchan, suddenly having an idea, thought: "Mu Hongfang is surely a crafty old scoundrel. He just told me in no uncertain terms that taking the floor would be starting a feud with the master. Now, he's doing his best to lead me on and have me reveal my expertise. If I say I know martial arts, he will definitely think that I am challenging him."

Luchan came up with a plan and hurriedly asked Master Mu a question, "I am so sorry for my oversight. So, Master Mu happens to be Hui. I have long heard of the Tantai (Springy Legs) that the Hui are world famous for. I am a young person with no experience. Ever since I was young and saw people practicing martial arts, I have loved it; however, my parents were not too keen about this interest of mine. Even though I had this wish, I could do nothing about it. Master, please teach me something. What kind of technique would be good for me? Rather than getting beaten up by someone, what potential do I have?"

Master Mu laughed and said, "If you really don't know anything, then that's good. When practicing martial arts, what you should fear most is knowing them superficially. If you don't have the pure training, this can lead to disaster. Since you have this goal, in the future why don't you seek out a famous master to study with?"

"I certainly will find a famous teacher in the future and study and practice for a few years. Master Mu, what kind of training are you doing? Could it perhaps be Tai Chi Chuan?"

"Why do you guess that I do Tai Chi Chuan?"

"Because I had heard it said that here in Huaqing Prefecture, there had arisen a Master Chen famous for his Tai Chi Chuan. In the north of Henan and beside the mountain, no one else could supposedly be compared with the profound skill of this Master Chen. I believe you are nearby and guess that you must be practicing Tai Chi Chuan as well. Am I right?"

When Master Mu heard this, he nodded, saying, "Xiao Xiong Di, what you said is correct, but learning a martial art like this Tai Chi Chuan is easier said than done. We are very close by this Chen village, just a few kilometers. Although we are close to this famous martial artist, we don't have the opportunity to learn any of his consummate art. This kind of skill Master Chen does not teach lightly. Nor does he rush to take on students. What I'm teaching has nothing in common with Master Chen and his school of teaching. In the beginning, when I first practiced martial arts, this Master Chen had not yet made a name for himself. At that time, in martial arts circles, I had never heard of this person. However, when Tai Chi Chuan gained wide respect, Master Chen's fame resounded in the martial arts community. But, by that age, I had already let too much time slip by. Even if I wanted to join his school, and they would have been willing to accept me, I would not have been able to learn it any more. Bias between martial arts schools has always been a very serious issue. Martial arts masters especially do not like people to change schools of training half way. Among us Hui, if you can't even do the ten routines of our own Tantui all the way through, let alone doing any other type of training, people will look down on you. Xiao Xiong Di, how do you know so much about Master Chen? Who did you hear this from? Do you want to become a disciple at Master Chen's school and learn martial arts?"

Following these questions, Yang Luchan felt unsure and hesitatingly answered: "Me? I just heard the guard at our house say something once. Since I arrived today in Huaqing Prefecture, that Master Chen came to mind and I asked you about him. How could someone as ignorant as me ever study such a consummate art?"

Master Mu smiled and said, "Xiao Xiong Di, don't be so modest. It looks like your physique is kind of poor, but a spirit like that would be up to the task of learning these consummate techniques. I have heard Master Chen say that learning Tai Chi Chuan does not require primarily putting in a lot of effort. You have to have talent and be smart to understand it. Even from the name of this martial art, you can already understand it includes a very deep internal gong fu that embodies the ebb and flow of yin and yang and the marvel of the growth and restraint of the five elements. It would seem that if someone like you, young

man, entered Master Chen's school, he wouldn't need more than a handful of years. Why worry about not being able to make a name for yourself?"

Yang Luchan listened to Master Mu's flowing words and, knowing all about it, could not help but be happy. Without realizing it, he blurted out, "Master Mu, with a build like mine, if I wanted to practice Tai Chi Chuan, do you think Master Chen would accept me?" Then Mu Hongfang said, "That depends on yourself. If you humbly request with all respect and sincerity, why would they not accept you? If you really want to learn this consummate art, you need no second plan. Don't treat this lightly."

Yang Luchan said, "I was born to love martial arts. Don't imagine that if I met a famous master, I would be contemptuous. Even if I met people who hire themselves out to make a living, I would be afraid I would not respect them enough." Luchan suddenly realized he had said something that let the cat out of the bag and tried to think of what he could say to make it better. His face turned red, and his ears burned.

Mu Hongfang could not control his laughter saying, "Xiao Xiong Di, you are practicing martial arts and don't need to hide it. What school of martial arts do you practice? Who is your master? You don't need to say anything. Since you know martial arts, we are one family. We can observe and study each other's skills. This wouldn't count as you challenging me. I won't treat you as a Jianghu* visitor. Come, come, come, let's practice." Looking back at his students, he said, "What do you think about your master's judgment?" He turned back and spoke to Luchan again, "Xiao Xiong Di, don't stand on ceremony. Use a Jianghu saying: a single man's eyes are sharper than scissors. One thought I already have, you did not come here to challenge me; but from the first look, I can see that you know gongfu. Xiao Xiong Di, who is your teacher? Tell me so I may know it."

Master Mu asked Luchan about his master, but Luchan thought to himself: "I'd better not mention Master Liu's name. My training is not deep, and I didn't make Master look good as a result of receiving his praise. Better not to make my master lose face. Then he answered Master Mu in a serious tone, "I was telling the truth, but I just watched the courtyard guards practicing martial arts and, on the



spur of the moment, begged them to teach me a little bit. I cannot say that I have a master and am someone's disciple."

"Xiao Xiong Di, you are too modest. We are one style in the martial world. Knowing martial arts, more or less, is nothing to compare. It seems to me that you don't want to say your master's name. What kind of martial arts do you practice?"

"You're laughing. I just barely practiced a few days of Long Fist and just felt the sequence. After all, I didn't understand the profundity of this martial art. So, when I talk to people, I never dare say that I 'know martial arts.' Master Mu, you are senior to me according to the martial arts code. After your repeated kind inquiries, I was not afraid of your laughing at my speaking up. Truly, I still have to say I am an amateur when it comes to martial arts."

Mu Hongfang gave a laugh and said, "So modest, what else can we say? You are a guest of my inn, and definitely I can't treat you in the normal manner under the martial arts code. Come, let's exchange a couple of techniques just to pass the time."

Yang Luchan recoiled a step back and, waving him off with his hands, said, "You really must be joking now. If you have me take the floor, that would be worse than if you just gave me a thrashing."

"What nonsense! Xiao Xiong Di, you're too inflexible. What does that have to do with anything? We're just going to play around a little. We've already talked this to death. Do you think we're really going to have at it? Let me speak frankly. I also practiced a little Long Fist, but my teacher was from the south and taught me for a very short period of time. His accent was hard to understand very well. It was really tough to get proficient. Later on, I practiced in front of other long-timers, as soon as I did my Tantui, they shook their heads and said the movements were very different – not at all the same. After this, I noticed a difference between southern and northern martial arts. As long as I meet northern martial artists, I surely want to ask for their feedback. As luck would have it, I met you tonight, Xiao Xiong Di, and I am so happy. We should check each other out. After all, what is the difference between my Long Fist and northern martial arts? I'm not insisting on testing out whose training is purer or whose movements show the most skill. I just want you to show me some of the forms in your style, and I'll let you have a look at my forms. I get something new to think about; you get something new to think about. We both win. What else can you say?"

Mu Hongfang kept pressing Luchan, and it was hard for him to get out of it. Looking very reluctant, he timidly said to Mu Hongfang: "Master Mu, I've already explained many times. Truly, I cannot say I know martial arts. I just practice this Long Fist sequence, but have no clue about analyzing it or how to use it. Master Mu, if you really want me to show you, I'll just have to obey your wishes. I just hope that Master Mu will be forgiving and give me some advice about how to do it better."

Then Mu Hongfang spoke with a smile, "Hmm... Xiao Xiong Di, you are just too humble. You don't need to be so guarded. How could I take advantage of such a youngster?" With this, he clasped his hands together and gave a salute, saying, "Please begin."

With Mu Hongfang pressing him at every step, Yang Luchan could not refuse any longer, so he said, "I will respectfully comply and brashly make a demonstration. If I make any mistakes, please don't hesitate to give me corrections. But, if you want to spar with me, I'm not up to it."

"Please go ahead and demonstrate."

Turning to the side and waving toward the class, he said, "Give him some more room and watch Master Yang's performance. You might learn something." The students scattered in confusion, bowing their heads together and exchanging whispered comments. Yang Luchan felt regret, thinking to himself: "One moment's impetuosity got me into this mess! If I perform well, they will insist that I spar. If I don't perform well, they're going to laugh at me. What should I do? As he walked out onto the floor, he kept thinking for a way out. Suddenly, an idea came to him. For the time being, he would not reveal how much he actually knew about martial arts. "First, I want to see how much skill this Master Mu really has. If I can really assess his skill, I'll be able to subdue him. Then I'll give him a hard time so that from now on, he won't exploit his age and seniority to look down on young folk like me!"

As he thought over this, Luchan arrived at the south end of the practice floor. Mu Hongfang followed beside him. All the students were scattered around on all sides, a dozen or more eyes locked on him.

Blushing, Luchan first gathered in his spirit and pretended that no one was there. Gliding around in a half circle, he at once clasped his hands together and saluted Mu Hongfang. Then, he bowed close to the ground and turned to face the onlookers on all sides, saying, "Master and senior gongfu brothers, don't laugh at me, but please share your comments and corrections. I'm here to show my poor skills." After these words, he immediately stood by the gate. Beginning the Long Fist form, he assumed a posture, asking Mu Hongfang, "Is starting like this correct?" "There's nothing wrong about it, continue, don't stand on



ceremony.” After this, Yang Luchan, wielding his two fists and leading with the spirit in his eyes, started to perform the movements, one by one.

Yang Luchan intentionally performed the movements sloppily and sluggishly. Mu Hongfang grinned and spoke to his disciples, “Do you all see? This Master Yang’s form truly comes from a famous teacher. Look how stable and how precise his movements are.” Yang Luchan performed all ninety-one postures from beginning to end. Even though he performed slowly, his hand techniques were perfect. When he concluded the form, he again saluted Mu Hongfang, fist in palm, and said, “I messed it up and made Master Mu laugh. Which movements were not correct, Master Mu? Would you mind giving me some corrections?”

Mu Hongfang finished watching with full concentration. Rolling his eyes, he came up, saying with a laugh: “Xiao Xiong Di, let’s drop the formality. You performed very well. These must be the true teachings of a famous master. However, this really reflects what I said. How you performed was not really wrong. It was just that you and I do it differently. It looks like southern style and northern style really do have differences. The way you did “Immortal Shines Palm” is distinctly different from the way I do it. Why don’t you do it again?”

Hearing this, Luchan thought to himself: “Maybe southern and northern style really are different. Why don’t I use this opportunity to entice him to demonstrate a little? I can increase my knowledge and find out exactly how different they are.” Then he agreeably went to the center of the floor with Mu Hongfang following behind.

Luchan did “Immortal Shines Palm” just as before. Mu Hongfang said, “Xiao Xiong Di, this movement is clearly different. What is this modified technique?”

“This is an attacking movement. If it doesn’t work, you follow up with a change, sinking your waist and using “Rapid-Fire Arrows and Step Forward, Thrust Palm.”

Mu Hongfang said, “When I first learned this technique, my master said: ‘Whenever this ‘Immortal Shines Palm’ doesn’t work, then you need to quickly withdraw and go on the defense and retreat, not follow up by attacking. See, this is reversed from northern style. Come, Xiao Xiong Di, you just attack. I’ll have a try at defending. That way, we can see which of the two ways is more functional and which actually is more efficient. Then we’ll know which method is correct.

At this moment, Luchan viewed the circumstances of what Mu Hongfang said as being very odd. Unconsciously, he started becoming curious and thought to himself: “I’ll just pretend I don’t know how! If I really cannot show any skill or power, even Master Liu would lose face with me.” With such thoughts, but still speaking with humility, he said, “I

can only do the postures. How can I be up to launching an attack against a master?”

“Xiao Xiong Di, there you go again. In martial arts, if you don’t get personal experience by exchanging blows, how can you tell what’s right and what’s wrong? Also, since I am speaking somewhat arrogantly, I might even allow you to hit me.”

Yang Luchan’s face turned red. He got angry. Abruptly, he said to Mu Hongfang, “You’re too conceited! You look at me and can tell that I can’t strike you? If that’s what you wish, I will obey!”

Yang Luchan, still using the technique of ‘Double-Butterfly Palm,’ suddenly attacked the master. Mu Hongfang used ‘Double Push on the Window’ and neutralized it, saying: “This way, I neutralize your technique.” Luchan focused and raised his spirit, using his hands and feet more flexibly than before, as if he were a different person. Yang Luchan snapped his fist back with a crack, retracting his technique. Suddenly, he moved down with his right foot moving forward a half step, leaned his body, and thrust out his right arm, striking with palm energy towards Mu Hongfang’s waist with a whoosh!

Unexpectedly, Mu Hongfang deliberately took advantage seeking to embarrass and insult him. Without even moving his feet, he allowed Luchan’s fist to arrive, quickly pulled in his stomach and chest, tucked his waist slightly in to the right, and used his right hand to grab Luchan’s wrist with a whirl. He used “Follow the Current, Pull the Lamb,” leading outward, and used his right leg to trip Luchan’s right shin. He used the borrowed energy to strike back and made Luchan fall down face first on the ground. All the disciples broke out in an uproar. This technique did not come from the Long Fist, but was Mu Hongfang’s own exquisite kicking technique.

In our next issue, Chapter 3:
Seeing an injustice on the road,
Trying to mediate involves a fight

Footnote:

*Jianghu – The term “Jianghu” literally means “rivers and lakes”; however, it often refers metaphorically to the parallel and mostly fictional and romantic world of itinerant tradesmen and martial chivalry that was once associated with the “wild” rivers and lakes in the borderlands of south China. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jianghu> for more information.

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Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan SEMINARS



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6th Generation Yang Family and

5th Generation Lineage Holder of Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan



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Mar 30, 2012 (Evening) Sword Form
Mar 31, 2012 Sword Form
Apr 1, 2012 49 Form
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