



Tai Chi Chuan

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL YANG FAMILY TAI CHI CHUAN ASSOCIATION

国际杨氏太极拳协会杂志



Contents



All tai chi chuan enthusiasts are invited to submit articles, letters, and pictures for publication. Both critical and complimentary letters concerning the form and content of this journal are welcome. Please send correspondence in electronic format to:
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3 **PRESIDENT'S LETTER**



4 **SYMPOSIUM**
The 2019 Symposium is 5 full days of inspiring presentations, performances and workshops with a sprinkling of special events.

MASTER AND DISCIPL

8 **The Relationship Between Teacher and Student, Master and Disciple.**

10 **From Relaxation to Hardness**

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE

14 **Seeking Tai Chi**

TAI CHI OR YOGA

16 **Two Paths to Healthy Exercise Considered**

SEMINARS

22



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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

YANG JUN, President

Transcribed by Edward Moore

At the beginning of this year I was able to promote tai chi by being part of the Belt and Road Chinese Culture World Tour along with Masters Chen Zhenglei, Fu Qingquan, Qui Huifang, and Chen Juan. We started at the beginning of February in San Francisco. Next, we went to Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Each visit was organized by a local non-profit group. We were welcomed and supported by the Chinese Consulate and supported by the local Chinese Community as we taught in these three different cities. In Las Vegas and LA, the tour also included artists who did performances during the event. The masters in the program were selected by Chinese officials to represent the art of tai chi. I am honored to be on this team for the second time to help China promote tai chi chuan in the West. At the beginning of March this year we also had our disciple training in China, which is becoming an annual tradition that is like a family reunion. There were about 100 disciples there, and we also had a show. Through this training we did a presentation for the public with the martial arts association of Yiwu in Zhejiang province. There were hundreds of people there. Yiwu is a very famous city for being the beginning point of the Belt and Road. The city is important because all goods being shipped out of China go through there, and then to the world. After Yiwu, I went to Yunnan Province, where we were hosted by the Hong He Area Martial Arts Association. We had three days of training and teaching for the members of this non-profit organization, which is an official group that is associated with the Government

Sports Office. There were about a thousand people who came to the seminar, and they were very excited to learn from the Yang Family. It was very exciting to see how many Chinese people love traditional Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan. Next, we are planning to hold the symposium in Italy. There is still time to register for this event.

Next year will be a very special occasion, because it is my grandfather's 95th birthday. We are going to meet to celebrate his birthday and the contributions he has made to spreading Yang Family Tai Chi. I really hope that we can all plan ahead together to celebrate this special day. We will also use the opportunity of meeting to have an international tournament and promote Yang Family Tai Chi. At the end of September, we will have the first Yang Family Tai Chi Tournament in Jiang Jia Kou, which is famous for being the site of the 2022 Winter Olympics. When I first started to promote Yang Family Tai Chi in China in 2017, I felt that our goal was not a very easy job, but I am willing to carry on the duty to spread Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan not only in the West, but also to promote the root of tai chi in China. The support of my international students, friends and family has encouraged me to continue, and together we will succeed! Thanks again to all of our members for continuing to support the Association! Together we will promote Yang Family Tai Chi, and help more people join us in practicing so that they can also receive the benefits of tai chi.

I hope to see you all in Italy!





From May 25 to 29, 2019, the Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Foundation will host the 2019 International Tai Chi Chuan Symposium in Selvino, Italy.

This is a remarkable opportunity to experience other styles directly from famous masters and their students. The tai chi gong practice consists of shorter forms that allow the student to more easily experience the character of each style. This is an excellent way to get an overview of the major branches of tai chi chuan, each one directly from the most respected masters of their styles.



MASTER CHEN ZHENGLEI — *Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan*

Master Chen Zhenglei is the 11th generation direct-lineage inheritor of Chen Family Tai Chi Chuan and is considered to be one of the most accomplished teachers of his generation. In 1995 he was recognized by the Chinese Wushu Association as one of China's top 10 martial artists. Master Chen has represented his lineage in many tournaments consistently winning top honors both nationally and internationally, and his students have been among China's most successful martial competitors. Master Chen has been teaching tai chi chuan close to 50 years, and has published articles in major martial arts journals and books on Chen tai chi chuan.



MASTER YANG JUN — *Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan*

Sixth Generation descendent from the founder of Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan and 5th generation inheritor, Master Yang Jun is a graduate of Shanxi University in physical education and has been training, studying, and then teaching Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan since the age of 5. In 1998, he and his grandfather, Master Yang Zhen duo, founded the International Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Association with the mission of bringing Yang Family tai chi practitioners together and to share the family's standard of practise worldwide to help humankind. As the first of his family to bring their art to the West, spreading Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan internationally, with over 80 centers and schools on five continents and teachers in 24 countries, has been one of his finest accomplishments. His greatest wish is to unite practitioners in China and the West into one big family where despite national borders and cross-cultural differences, everyone is linked together through their love of tai chi chuan.



MASTER WU KWONGYU (EDDY WU) — *Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan*

Fifth Generation Master Wu Kwong Yu is the eldest son of Wu Tai Kwei and the great grandson of Wu Chien Chuan. In 1976, he succeeded his uncle Master Wu Daxin as the Master of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Toronto, Canada. Since then, he continues to foster the development of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan throughout Asia, North America and Europe and has established official academies in these regions. In 1995, he created the International Wu Style Tai Chi Chu



MASTER ZHONG ZHENSHAN — *Wu (Hao) Style Tai Chi Chuan*

Master Zhong Zhenshan was born in the town of Guangfu and is the 5th generation inheritor of Wu (Hao) Family Tai Chi Chuan. He has served on numerous tai chi chuan organizations in China and is dedicated to the dissemination, promotion and development of Wu's tai chi chuan. Master Zhong is known for his superb skill as well as knowledge of the theory and history of tai chi chuan. The author of several books and essays on Wu (Hao) style tai chi chuan, in 2006 his "Wu-Style Taijiquan" became one part of "The Treasures of Chinese Martial Arts".



MASTER SUN YONGTIAN — *Sun Style Tai Chi Chuan*

A distinguished and respected member of China's martial arts community, Master Sun Yongtian studied for many years under the guidance of Sun Jianyun, the daughter of the founder of Sun Style Tai Chi Chuan, Sun Lutang. Master Sun is the Vice-Chairman of the Beijing Martial Arts Association and the Vice-President of the Sun Tai Chi Research Institute in China.



MASTER HE YOU LU — *He Style Tai Chi Chuan*

Master He was born in the town of Zhaobao, Wen County, Henan Province. He is the lineal descendant of He Zhaoyuan, the founder of He Style (also referred to as Zhaobao He Style) Tai Chi Chuan. A seventh-duan Chinese martial artist, Master He has dedicated himself to the research, promotion and dissemination of tai chi, and has spread the tai chi chuan culture both at home and abroad. He is the president of the He Style Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Wen County and is the representative successor of the He Style's cultural heritage. He is also the chairman of the He Style Tai Chi Chuan Association in Jiaozuo, Henan Province.



SYMPOSIUM EVENTS

TAI CHI CUP

The inaugural Yang Family Tai Chi Cup is a special event that invites all practitioners of Yang style tai chi chuan to come together in friendly competition. It is the first time that the many schools of Yang tai chi chuan will gather in one place. The tournament will be a reunion of Yang style tai chi chuan players and will demonstrate the interesting diversity of Yang tai chi chuan variations that have developed from many generations of family members and disciples.

The tournament will be for both individuals and groups, with events in hand form, sword, and saber forms.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



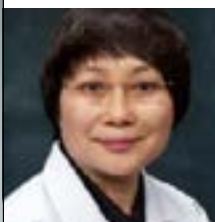
Dr. Patricia Huston, MD, CCFP, MPH: *What Science Knows and Does Not Know About Tai Chi*

Dr. Huston has a dual academic appointment at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Medicine in the Department of Family Medicine and the School of Epidemiology and Public Health. She has worked as a family physician, a public health physician and a science editor. She has attended meetings at the World Health Organization as an Expert Advisor, been on multiple national and international committees, and was the President of the international Council of Science Editors.



Dr. Fuzhong Li: *Transforming Traditional Tai Chi Chuan Techniques Into Integrative Movement Therapy for Older Adults at High Risk of Falling and People With Movement Disorders*

Dr. Li is Senior Scientist at the Oregon Research Institute (ORI). Dr. Li has been Principal Investigator (PI) on fourteen National Institutes of Health (NIH)/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded research grants. His research areas include falls prevention, exercise training on balance, postural control, and mobility for older adults and people with movement disorder. He has published a series of papers on randomized controlled trials evaluating the effectiveness of tai chi chuan interventions on a range of psychosocial and biomedical outcomes and falls in older adults and people with movement disorders.



Dr. Chenchen Wang, MD, MSc: *Tai Chi for Chronic Musculoskeletal Pain and Well-Being*

Dr. Wang is Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine and Director of the Center for Integrative Medicine at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. She is one of the world's most cited authorities in Tai Chi Mind-Body Intervention and Chronic Pain research.

As principal investigator, Dr. Wang has been awarded numerous NIH grants to test the health benefits of tai chi. She also has won a 10-year privileged NIH Midcareer Investigator Award and currently mentors over 50 individual and team scientists in the United States and across the world in Integrative Medicine disciplines. Over the years, her team accomplishments have garnered praise and academic prizes worldwide for outstanding merit and best research awards in the Integrative Medicine field. In addition, Dr. Wang holds many advisory roles, including serving as a Featured Expert for the New England Journal of Medicine Group Open Forum, Tufts Steering and Scientific Affairs Committees, membership in the National Advisory Council for Complementary and Integrative Health at the NIH, Expert Panel of American College of Rheumatology Guideline Committee, and Vice Chairperson of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Society.



Emeritus Professor Nicola Robinson, PhD, BSc (Hons), FBAcC, Hon MFPHM:
Researching Tai Chi: Trials and tribulations.

Dr. Robinson was appointed Professor of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Integrated Health at London South Bank University in 2011.

Following her BSc (Hons) in biological sciences (Leicester University) and PhD in immunology at Manchester University, Dr. Robinson studied acupuncture, becoming a registered acupuncturist in 1982. She was awarded a Fellowship of the British Acupuncture Council in 2008 and was previously chair of the BAcC's research committee. In 2004, Nicola was the recipient of a Winston Churchill Traveling Fellowship to visit China, to explore educational and research initiatives in TCM.

As well as her experience in health services research in western medicine, Dr. Robinson has conducted research using TCM interventions (particularly acupuncture and tai chi) and in a variety of disease areas, such as musculoskeletal disease, women's health, mental health, diabetes, HIV, and cystic fibrosis. She has an active research career and has written over 200 scientific articles in peer reviewed journals frequently presenting nationally and internationally.




Dr Tran Ba, *Brain Functional Imaging: (How) Can it help understanding the effects of tai chi chuan?*

After studying medicine for six years in Paris-Sorbonne University, Dr Tran Ba entered the field of radiology, focusing on thoracic imaging and neuro-imaging and training in various university hospitals in Paris under the tutelage of Professors Brillet, Brauner, Rocher, Buy and others. This year, Dr. Tran Ba will become Chef de Clinique at the University Hospital of Avicenne in the Paris region. On his last year of residency, Dr Tran Ba started to develop an interest in traditional Chinese medicine and followed courses about the fundamentals of Chinese medicine in a curriculum supervised by Professors Baumelou and Liu at the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital (Paris). The understanding of the fundamentals of Chinese Medicine and its philosophical tenets sparked his curiosity as to how radiology, and more specifically neuro-imaging, could help Western physicians better understand Chinese medicine.



Ms. Holly Sweeney-Hillman, *Tai chi principles based on biomechanics*

Ms. Holly Sweeney-Hillman is an Adjunct Professor of Tai Chi Chuan at Kean University, Union, New Jersey. She holds a Bachelors degree in Graphic Arts and Dance from Mary Washington College, a Masters degree in Orthopedic Biomechanics from New York University, and is certified in the F.M. Alexander Technique and Craniosacral Therapy.

Holly has written numerous articles on the biomechanics of tai chi movement for the International Journal of Tai Chi Chuan. Her life long passion is the scientific analysis and therapeutic application of movement to improve human health and performance. Her other passion is equestrianism. 







DISCIPLE STORY

BY LI XIU AND YAO TIE BIN

Students are linked to the teacher. To talk about the two is to mainly talk about knowledge transfer. This is what today's relationships between teachers and students are about. However, the relationship between masters and their disciples is more profound. Disciples are linked to the master. Unlike students, in addition to passing on knowledge, the master also teaches his disciples about all aspects related to life, morality and values.

In ancient times, craftsmanship was often taught on the basis of mentoring and apprenticeship. Disciples often lived and worked in the master's house. Continuing their studies, they had to work for the master for several years, such as in the opera and drama circles. If masters had family members also studying with them, their disciples also had to be supported. This was more common in the martial arts world. Of course, there were also rich disciples who hired famous masters to teach at home.

To become a disciple accepted by the master is not easy. There is a higher standard for masters teaching disciples than there is for teachers teaching students. The conditions are more demanding. Normally, character is the primary factor a master must observe in a disciple. The technical ability can be lower, but the disciple's character cannot be low, which is the "top mark" of choosing a disciple. Those who want to become disciples must go through a process of long assessment. Second, it is the disciples who should have the responsibility of acquisition of knowledge, in the sense that disciples should not covet special favors. They must shoulder a heavy responsibility - to inherit the teacher's character, skills, and ideas, so that valuable things can be passed on. In general, a teacher criticizes his students less than a master criticizes his disciples.

Compared with teachers and students, the responsibilities and obligations between masters and disciples are more profound. Famous masters often cherish their lineage, and

cherish the skills and knowledge handed down by older generations. They always try to find good disciples to "pass the torch" to, to impart their character, skills. Masters feel they are duty-bound to do this.

For the disciple, honor for the master is also a great honor for themselves. For example, in the Beijing Opera industry, Wang Yaoqing, the "Tongtian Master", accepted Mei Lanfang as a disciple. And in the martial arts community, Yang Chengfu received Chen Weiming as a disciple. Becoming a disciple of a famous master attains the disciple a high-profile. This is a reputation they are all proud of, whether it is a master or a disciple.

There is another difference between a disciple and a student. The student who is directly taught by a master is called a disciple, but the student who is indirectly taught by a teacher or master is called the student.

For example, in China's universities, only graduate and doctoral students can be lectured by a teacher. However, undergraduates are often taught by graduate and doctoral students. In ancient times, this was called "Phase imparting": students cannot directly get to be taught by the teacher, therefore, they are only students, not disciples. When the Confucian Dong Zhongshu taught his class "Spring and Autumn", his disciples gave his lectures to his students. Many of the students did not even see Dong Zhongshu. In the Jin Dynasty, the famous hermit Yang Lan, sometimes had as many as 100 students, but only a few became "different disciples" to whom he passed his knowledge directly. Those who didn't belong to Yang's select circle of disciples could only listen to what Yang's disciples dictated to them.

In summary, the disciple has a close relationship with the master. There is a "father and brotherhood" relationship that includes deep family feelings and ethics. Between teachers and students, there is much less. ☯





David Garritano
Certified Instructor. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

You have probably heard many people saying they practice tai chi because they need to relax. It's true that tai chi helps you to relax, but it might be the other way around: it's not because you practice tai chi that you'll relax, it's because you relax that you'll practice tai chi. Your tai chi teacher has asked you to relax, right? Or even in your own practice you might remember it quite often. In fact, when we want to meditate, to calm our mind, to seek well-being, or even when we just want to take a break in our daily activities and slow down a little bit, we naturally notice the need to relax. Grandmaster Yang Jun and the ancestors before him have always put this method as an imperative for tai chi practice.



But what is relaxation?

How do we relax, and why should we relax?

Relaxation (放松 - fàng sōng) is one of the most important training methods in tai chi chuan, and specifically, it is a method to work on your energy. From the Classics we grasp the idea that tai chi chuan's purpose is "to increase longevity and extend one's years, as if in the springtime of youth" (Song of Thirteen Postures - 三十勢歌). What this means is that its goal is to work on our energy to improve our health. According to the Traditional Chinese Medicine point of view, to cultivate your health you should cultivate your qi (气). And one of the best ways to cultivate your qi is to increase chi circulation in the dāntián (丹田) area. Looking into Wang Zong Yue's Taijiquan Treatise (王宗岳太極拳論), it is pretty clear: "The qi sinks down to the dantian" (沈丹田 - qì chén dāntián). In other words, we need to perform abdominal breathing, which is also called pre-natal breathing¹. This helps us to nourish our qi, strengthen our body, calm our mind, and in consequence, extend our life. This is the type of breathing we do when we are really relaxed, and most commonly when we are asleep. The breath naturally flows with the abdominal area movement of expansion and contraction. But how do we do it besides when we are asleep?

To sink the qi down to the dantian and the relaxation method are intrinsically connected, because the lungs govern the qi and if there is any blockage in our breathing (from tension) we won't be able to breathe deeply and sink the qi. Both chi and breath will help us to achieve a specific goal which will be a fundamental element to develop the whole tai chi chuan training system, and its so called "rooting" (which means stability). We find its pieces in many teachings left for us by the ancestors. When we look in the Classics or even in Grandmaster Yang Chengfu's Essentials, we find many clues of how we should do it. But to get to the proper relaxation and then to sink the qi to the dantian area, we need first to achieve some adjustments and further understanding.



The Classics point out the importance of stability, and this is part of what we call The Thirteen Postures. Five of them are related to our footwork: Advance, Retreat, Look Left, Gaze Right and Central Equilibrium. These “five steps” point us to physical balance through stance technique (which extends to mental balance)². According to Grandmaster’s Yang Jun explanation, the five steps must be unified together to perform Central Equilibrium (中定 - zhōng dìng). Through this ability it will be possible to make your center stable in order to release energy using your waist.

In the beginning of this article I asked the question: why do we want to relax? If you practice tai chi, you have the guidelines of a training method, but if you don’t, why should you relax? Relaxation is generally related to a state of calmness, well-being, and stability. When you are not calm, you’re also not well, and you lose stability (physical or psychological). It agitates you, and it agitates your qi. In other words, if you don’t manage this, it takes away your balance. Thus, stability, balance and calm are all related.

Tai chi chuan works a lot on physical performance, body language, and understanding. And from the physical realm we develop a natural performance to regulate mind and energy. Then, to achieve balance we should aim at two directions: internal and external (from the yin-yang theory point of view).

Externally we should do two things: lower the center of gravity and make your stance wider. These two methods are quite simple. To lower your center of gravity you’ll become more stable because it’s closer to the ground. In comparison, when you are lying down (the most stable position you can achieve), how much lower can you go and still move freely? (Remember our goal is natural breathing).

To make your stance wider is the same logic we use on a tripod. We separate the feet to make our stance area larger. That’s why we have the concept of “shoulder width apart space”, for instance.

Internally, we have only one thing to do: sink the qi to the dantian. And, we must divide it in five areas. We must make adjustments in five areas in order to sink the qi and obtain pre-natal breathing. The first sentence of the Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Postures by Wu Yuxiang is: “use the heart-mind to

move the qi”. The first thing then is to focus and calm the mind. As the heart-mind is connected to the eyes, we have a very simple guideline: look forward, far away, don’t focus on any particular object, open your sight. This will help you calm your mind.

Second, we get the four body shape adjustments from Grandmaster Yang Chengfu’s Essentials: “head up, shoulders down and sink the elbows, open the back (from pulling your elbows) and naturally tuck in the chest, and relax the waist (open lumbar area)”.

Third, we get: “In standing, the body must be centrally aligned” and “the coccyx (tailbone) is centrally aligned” from the Tai Chi Classics. This means that we correct the body position, center the hip position and center the torso position.

Fourth, the weight location should be on the Bubbling Well in order to release your abdominal area to perform abdominal breathing. When the weight is located on the heels or too much on the ball of the foot and toes, it will become harder to breathe deeply because your abdominal area will be slightly tense.

Fifth is about energy, which shouldn’t be restrained. And here we get back to relaxation method: how do we do to relax?

According to Grandmaster Yang Jun’s teachings, we should open the joints, extend the tendons and look for a feeling of extension inside. How much? Enough so you feel your breathing is still comfortable, deep and natural. This is a very intimate adjustment and may vary from one person to another. As a result of these five adjustments, you’ll get the qi sinking down to the dantian area. What is the best method to practice these topics? In standing postures. When you’re standing still and not interacting with the external you can easily make these corrections.

Taking an extensive look at the Ten Essentials, we’ll find more about the relaxation method. The most relevant one is “use mind, not force” (用意不用力 - yòng yì bù yòng lì), which explicitly says to not use force, because it will restrain your energy. And implicitly, it says to relax, because it will release your energy flow. According to the previous discussion, now you know what to do, where to look to make adjustments and perform this principle.

We also need to consider “separate empty and full” (分虚实 - fēn xū shí), dividing the body into upper and lower body, where upper is light (empty) and lower is heavy (full). Separating this way, the relative distribution of energy, as the qi is sinking down. This way, the middle body (abdominal and lumbar area) will be flexible, with the comfortable feeling and a natural breathing providing the internal flow feeling, which we may call shùn (顺). If you have it in Standing Postures, you might say you’ve matched “match internal and external” (内外相合 - nèi wài xiāng hé) and obtained three benefits: regulate the body (調身 - tiáo shēn), regulate the breath (調吸 - tiáo xī) and calm the mind (靜心 - jìng xīn).

It reaches another level of understanding when you start to move. When you do the hand form you face the problem of coordination, and to perform the right type of energy, the even flow feeling, you should seek for softness to help you. Here it is important to understand the connection with the relaxation method. From relaxation experience in the standing postures you were able to sink the qi, open joints, extend tendons and get the inner flow feeling. This softness obtained from relaxation training makes your upper body light and this will help your coordination because you’ll be able to connect the parts and unify the body, thus unify the energy. That’s why we choose slow motion to practice the Form, to regulate the “whip feeling”.

But which type of coordination are we talking about? Two types actually: “match internal and external” (内外相合 - nèi wài xiāng hé) and “upper and lower follow one another” (上下相隨 - shàng xià xiāng suí). These correspond to “mind, energy and body” and “lower, middle and upper”, respectively. From soft performance you should find easier to “move continuously without interruption” (相连不断 - xiāng lián bù duàn) and also to “seek quiescence in movement” (动中求静 - dòng zhōng qiú jìng). Now you see how relaxation may have a major influence in tai chi chuan practice.

From tai chi philosophy we learn about balance and energy unification (the two complementary parts yin and yang). Therefore, soft only is not enough, we still need hard. The result of this training should help us to achieve a specific type of energy: tai chi energy, or in other words: soft and hard combined or complementary to each other. The relaxation method helps us become soft. Through softness, it helps us achieve a better coordination to connect every part of the body, making it unified into hardness. This way we can perform what is written in the Classics: “It’s rooted in the feet, issued by the legs, governed by the waist, and expressed in the finger (extremities)... There must be complete integration into one qi.”

To match the energy delivery as unified with stability, we should return to the footwork. It begins in the feet, which are the root, so we must perform the Central Equilibrium (中定 - zhōng dìng) in order to keep the center stable. Additional work regarding the rooting ability is the complementary action between push (deng) (蹬) and support (cheng) (撑), which also emphasizes the complementary nature of “two parts unified into one.” From relaxation, obtain softness, and then unify softness into hardness through single movement practice and staff practice; but there still is relaxation.

This training method is a very sophisticated interconnected system with many parts that relate to each other in more than one way, so we have to be conscious of which part we should study first to develop the ability to grasp the next, and maybe return to the same aspect with a different approach. We shouldn’t rush, there are no shortcuts... Gōngfū (功夫) is an endless journey of self-cultivation. ☯

1. When the baby is in the mother’s womb it “breathes” through the navel, absorbing the nutrients of its mother. Later when the baby is born, the post-natal breathing is opened through nose and lungs. But from energy point of view, the abdominal breathing continues to play a part on the energetic system, helping the body’s nourishment.

2. Based on the Five Elements theory (五行 - wǔ xíng), as explained by Grandmaster Yang Jun, we learn that it’s related to balance, both physical and mental (emotional)

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INSTRUCTOR PROFILE

GANG HUANG



INSTRUCTOR PROFILE

GANG HUANG

TEACHING AND LEARNING TAI CHI WITH NEIGHBORS AND COMMUNITY

I started my tai chi journey when I was in Junior High. My physical education teacher taught me some Chen Style Tai Chi and I also learned by reading tai chi books which have solid and dotted lines on 2D pictures to describe the 3D forms.

Throughout my journey in pursuing tai chi, I experienced the hardship of finding a good teacher. When one of my neighbors approached me to learn tai chi, I thought it would be a good idea to also teach this ancient practice in the community.

Only after I moved to New Jersey in 2004 did I resume my tai chi, learning more systematically.

This eventually got me admitted as Master Yang Jun's disciple. I became an authorized instructor in Yang Family Tai Chi.

My "school" (named "Seeking Tai Chi") is very young. It is in an informal setting and I do the teaching in my walkout basement, where I practice tai chi myself. Being fluent in both Chinese and English enables me to teach bilingually. To be able to translate as accurately as possible from the Chinese Classical Tai Chi articles to people in the West, definitely enriches learning both theory and practice. My classes are small. I value quality over quantity, so I can cover more details in class and also tailor teaching based on the individuals. My goal is to pass what I have learned from Master Yang Jun and other masters/teachers I have had the honor to learn from, i.e. the authentic traditional Tai Chi, as much as possible to my students. I typically attend several seminars/trainings in both China and the US every year, and take private lessons when possible so I can keep improving myself.

There is a saying in Chinese, “教學相長” (Jiàoxuéxiāngzhǎng), which means “teaching and learning help each other”. You get students’ with different ages and physical/health conditions, hear questions from the students perspectives, learn of obstacles your students run into. It really forces you to clarify your thoughts and pay attention to details that you may have never thought of if not for teaching.

As a disciple or just someone who has studied tai chi for some time, I think it is our obligation to share the knowledge and skills with people who

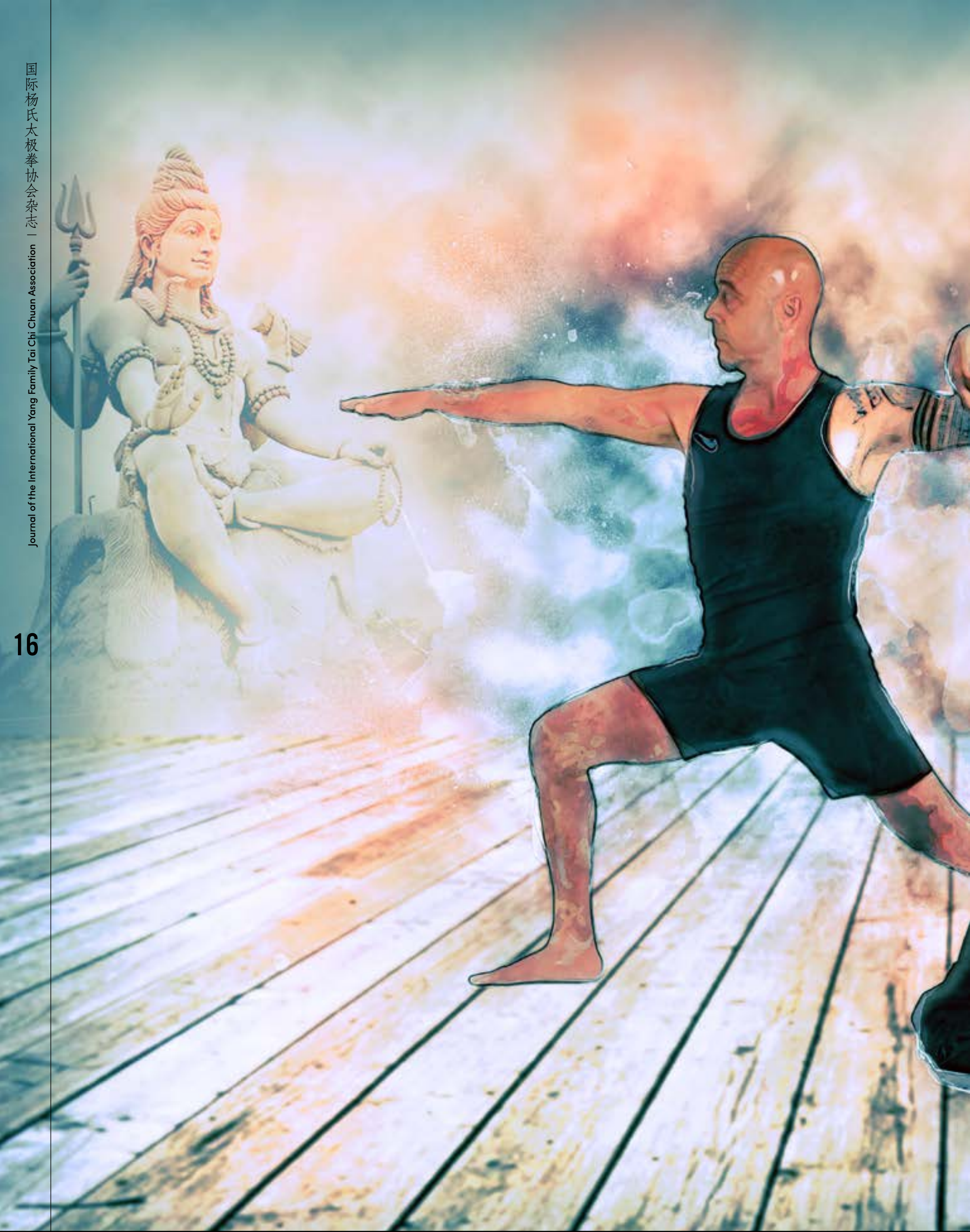
are interested and who can benefit from it. I try my best to make myself available to folks who want to learn more (I do have a full-time job to juggle as well). I have been also teaching tai chi classes in our



local Chinese School for four years now and also give seminars, demos and classes at local public libraries regularly. It is through my teaching that I made a lot of friends. I have seen the wonder that tai chi works on the students who began to sleep better, overcame fibromyalgia without pills, improved walking, balance, and stability, got rid of lower lumbar pain, improved memory, reduced stress and other benefits. I would say that the most rewarding part of teaching tai chi is to see it help people!

For more information, you can email me at seekingtaichi@gmail.com or visit my website at <https://www.facebook.com/SeekingTaichi/>. ☯







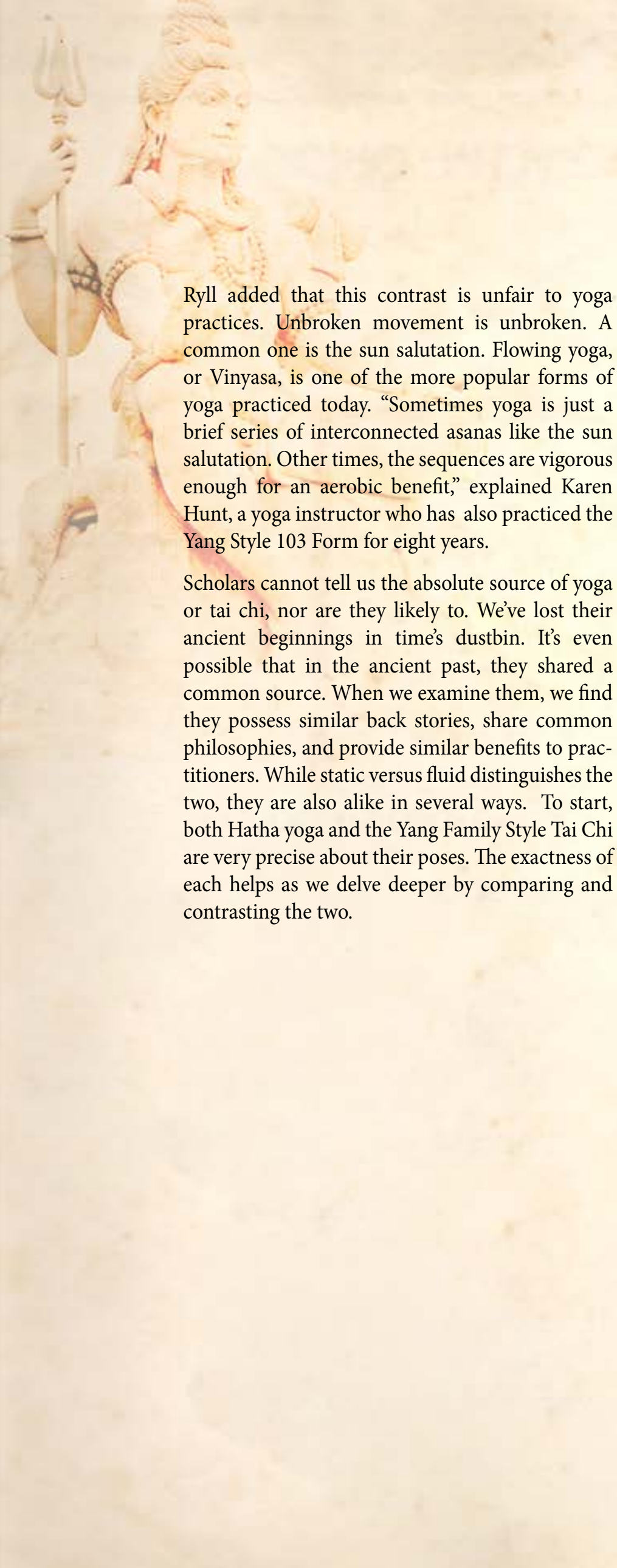
MARTIN MIDDLEWOOD

Portland, Oregon

A friend once told me that if I did yoga, it would ruin my tai chi. I laughed off his advice, stating, “That’s like saying standing ruins me for walking.” I ignored his warning and have practiced both yoga and tai chi for more than two decades. During that time, I’ve been fascinated by how two different systems work to accomplish many of the same benefits using divergent means. I’ve come to believe the two practices are complementary, sharing some characteristics and differing in others. For this article, I reached out to others I know in the Portland, Oregon area with training in both yoga and tai chi. Three are certified yoga instructors with more than seven years of tai chi practice, and one a practitioner of both yoga and tai chi for over 20 years.

When I asked them the difference between yoga and tai chi their answers revealed the obvious. One is mostly stationary, the other more flowing. “I see it like photography versus cinematography,” said yoga instructor and tai chi player Tom Ryll. “Yoga is like a still photograph, and tai chi like a film.”





Ryll added that this contrast is unfair to yoga practices. Unbroken movement is unbroken. A common one is the sun salutation. Flowing yoga, or Vinyasa, is one of the more popular forms of yoga practiced today. “Sometimes yoga is just a brief series of interconnected asanas like the sun salutation. Other times, the sequences are vigorous enough for an aerobic benefit,” explained Karen Hunt, a yoga instructor who has also practiced the Yang Style 103 Form for eight years.

Scholars cannot tell us the absolute source of yoga or tai chi, nor are they likely to. We’ve lost their ancient beginnings in time’s dustbin. It’s even possible that in the ancient past, they shared a common source. When we examine them, we find they possess similar back stories, share common philosophies, and provide similar benefits to practitioners. While static versus fluid distinguishes the two, they are also alike in several ways. To start, both Hatha yoga and the Yang Family Style Tai Chi are very precise about their poses. The exactness of each helps as we delve deeper by comparing and contrasting the two.

ARISE OUT OF HEALING WISDOM

Both yoga and tai chi are mindful exercises based in ancient curative wisdom. Yoga fits into the Ayurvedic healing tradition and tai chi into Traditional Chinese Medicine. These holistic methodologies focus on considering the entire person by balancing a patient’s energies. Although yoga’s energy inhabits the seven chakras and tai chi’s lives within three tan tien (dan tien), both energy sources align vertically inside the center of the body. They also claim the universe and one’s parents as resources for one’s “life force.”

Life force is a key concept in both. In yoga, the Sanskrit word for life force is prana. In tai chi, the Chinese term is qi (chi). Both prana and qi relate to one’s breath and energy. The concept of a life force isn’t unique to Asia. A similar idea once existed in the West. The Latin word, anima (meaning air, wind, breath, and sometimes mind or soul) defines the Western idea of life force. We find that meaning today in words like animal, animation, and animosity.

Both Asian systems describe five elements. In them earth, fire, and water are shared in common. Yoga rounds out its five elements with air and space; tai chi adds metal and wood to make five. In contrast, early Western medicine claimed only four elements: earth, fire, water, and air. In all three systems, when the body, mind, and spirit are aligned, people enjoy good health. When something disrupts that balance, they fall ill, and a physician helps them re-balance these elements. To restore health, the Ayurvedic, Chinese, and earliest Western physicians took into account a patient’s unique physical, emotional and psychological makeup and “life force.” They then worked its elements to improve the patient’s health. Of the three approaches, only Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine are still in use. The early Western physicians attempted cures by examining a patient’s four bodily fluids—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile—to diagnose illnesses. However, the advent of science proved it ineffective and eventually, healers abandoned this approach.

Yoga instructors explain that their system is a healing art. That attracts many students, like Mike Maney of Portland, Oregon, who turned to yoga in 1992 after two years of successive ski injuries. He used yoga principles to heal and avoid future injuries. Two years later he turned to tai chi and was hooked on both. People often turn to tai chi for health reasons, also. Although not yet recognized as a “healing art,” ongoing research shows tai chi is helpful for recovering cancer and heart patients, improving cognitive function, and for preventing falls. Its slow movements are also helpful for sufferers of fibromyalgia, a painful disease affecting the nerves and muscles. Currently, there’s significant research looking at its efficacy with Parkinson’s disease.

SPIRITUALITY

Yoga has a strong spiritual basis going back two thousand or more years to venerated Hindu writings, the Upanishads, Vedic scriptures, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Sutras. Hatha yoga and other yoga paths often mix spiritual and physical elements, some forms have no physical practice, and others are purely physical making intense demands on the body.

The meaning of yoga is “yoke” or “union.” This union exists on several levels—the union of the body, mind, and spirit. The union concept also connects one’s consciousness with infinite consciousness. It also conveys surrendering one’s ego to a higher power. The three “oms” opening a yoga class and the three “shantis” (peace) followed by “namaste” (we are the same, we are one) that end it tie back to the roots of yoga’s devotion. Laura Lacy, a yoga instructor who has practiced tai chi for eight years, explains yogic piety today saying, “Some consider yoga a religious practice. It may have originated as one, however, today many see it as a lifestyle for promoting mindfulness and harmony.”

Less overt, and little discussed, is tai chi’s spiritual practice. But it too reaches back to the ancient wisdom of Taoism (Tao Te Ching) and Confucianism (Analytics). The bow that opens and ends tai chi

practice show the respect for the art, the instructor, and those practicing together.

Although grounded in different spiritual models, the two approaches share features in common: the respect for others, concern for the family, compassion for all, and connection to an infinite spirit. Both advise “living in the moment” and use meditation to attain that potentiality. “For me, tai chi movement is the meditation; yoga prepares me for meditation,” Lacy said.

MIND BODY COORDINATION

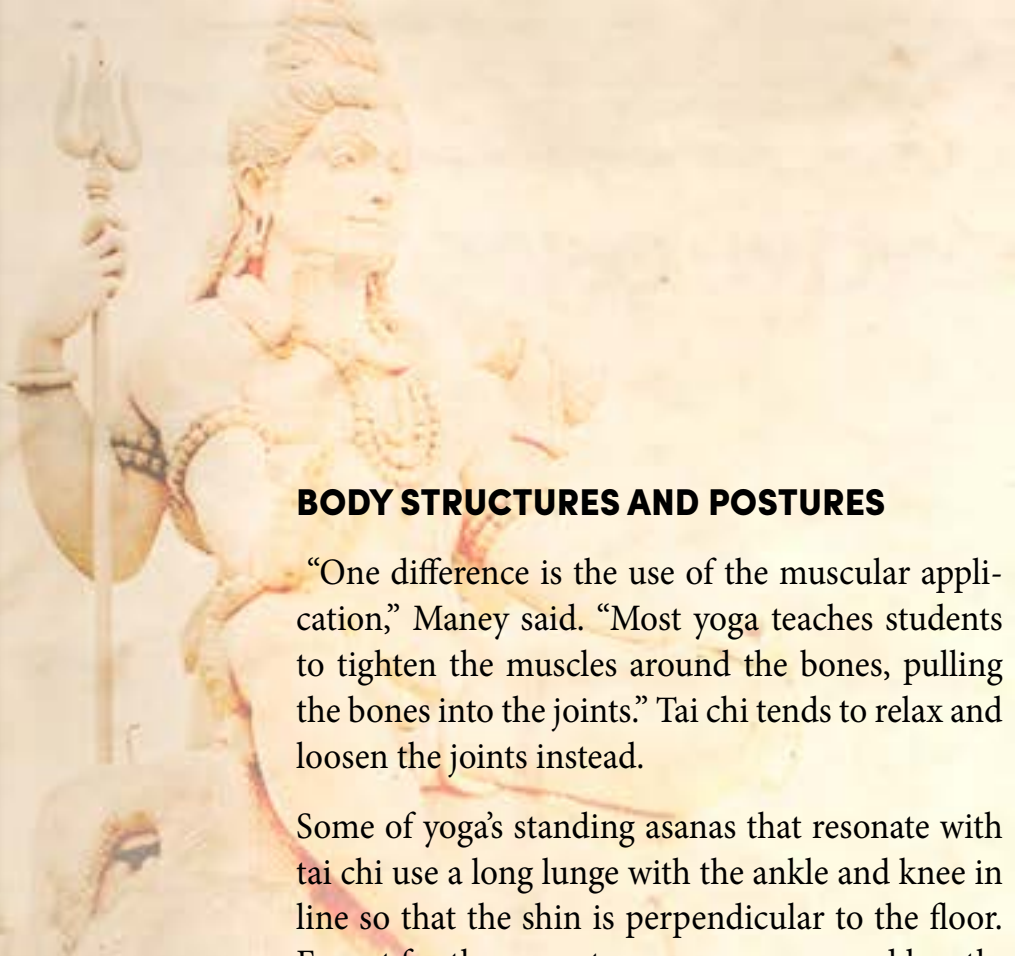
Looking at body structure in yoga poses and the end postures of tai chi, one sees how the two practices separate. Yoga has hundreds of postures (by some counts more than 800). Tai chi pales in comparison with only about 40 in the Yang Style 103 form (not counting its fluid interconnections). “Yoga poses and tai chi forms involve the precise placement of limbs, head, and torso in space,” explains Hunt. “Both aid development of proprioception, knowing where one’s body is in space.”

Yoga work stretches muscles and increases flexibility with the intent of connecting one to the universal consciousness. The martial intent of tai chi seems more pragmatic. The difference in intent is why they are executed differently. While one has a healing approach and the other a martial approach, they yield similar benefits. “Both require mind and body coordination—mind and body working together,” Maney explained. “This results in balance, energy flow, internal and physical strength, flexibility and suppleness.”

Perhaps it is these ideas that make some yoga asanas and tai chi postures somewhat analogous. Although there are several yoga asanas and tai chi postures that pair up closely, let’s look at these three:

- Mountain pose (Tadasana) and wuji
- Tree pose (Vrksasana) and Golden Rooster Stands on One leg
- Warrior 2 (Virabhadrasana II) and Single whip





BODY STRUCTURES AND POSTURES

“One difference is the use of the muscular application,” Maney said. “Most yoga teaches students to tighten the muscles around the bones, pulling the bones into the joints.” Tai chi tends to relax and loosen the joints instead.

Some of yoga’s standing asanas that resonate with tai chi use a long lunge with the ankle and knee in line so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor. Except for the yoga stance narrowness and length, its body structure matches the shorter bow stance in tai chi. In other asanas, both legs form almost an equilateral triangle with the ground, while the body shape varies based on the asana. It may be upright (Warrior 2); it may be bent (Extended Triangle or Utthita Trikonasana), or parallel to the ground while standing on one leg as in several asanas. In tai chi, the body shape is more consistent with only minor variations where the back is slightly rounded (Needle at Sea Bottom, Downward Punch, Low Single Whip) or the posture forms a diagonal line from the back heel to the head (Brush Knee and Push).

The fluidity of tai chi and the static nature of yoga share some common body structures. The yoga mountain asana and the wuji opening (and ending) of the tai chi form look alike. Both require relaxing the knees, leveling and lowering the shoulders (rounding) and back, a feeling of extending upward, while rooting the feet to the ground and turning inward. In both, the tongue touches just behind the eye teeth on the roof of the mouth. In some cases, both start with the feet together, while in others the feet are shoulder width apart. The point of both is to find a center of calmness within oneself.


Looking at similar one-legged stances, yoga’s tree asana and tai chi’s Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg deploy the body differently. To form the tree pose, the yogi stands firmly on one leg and places the non-standing foot inside the upper thigh (or inside the calf) pointing out straight from the side. Her hips and toes point forward. Her arms extend

vertically above the head and palms touch pressing in the elbow joint. When considering these two poses, Maney pointed out their differences: “In the tree asana, the emphasis is pushing the foot of the raised and bent leg into the standing leg to push the energy into the middle of the body and then extend it upwards.”

“Golden Rooster, the tai chi equivalent, shares the commonality of balance and extending through the spine, or axial extension,” he continued. “The difference lies in its martial application. Golden Rooster deploys upward, downward and outward energy through the lifted foot and knee, pressing downward with one hand and upward with the other, while spiraling energy through the back. My take is that yoga stresses strengthening and gaining flexibility by addressing specific muscles and body areas, whereas tai chi accomplishes suppleness through form practice and understanding the martial application.”

Warrior 2 and single whip poses are similar and interesting to compare. In Warrior 2 the heels are inline. The back foot is turned at 45 degrees. The yoga practitioner (yogi) distributes her weight evenly on both feet. Her torso is upright, and she contracts her muscles toward the bone to stabilize the stance without locking her joints. In the pose, her hips and shoulders face to the side, are parallel and stacked one atop the other. Her arms extend out from her sides. Her palms face the ground and she extends her fingers in both directions. She aligns her elbows over her knees. This long narrow stance challenges her balance as if she’s standing on a tightrope. She remains stable only by engaging many large and small muscle groups in the legs and core that help hold her in place and balanced, a goal of the practice.

Unlike the stability of yoga, the fluidity of tai chi requires transitioning in a controlled, smooth and even manner from one martial application to the next. Compared to the long lunge of Warrior 2, the single whip stance must be shorter, because longer stances decrease mobility. In Single Whip the player also extends her arms away from them, but not



straight out to the side. Her elbows and knees are in line. Her stance is shoulder width and shorter than Warrior 2. Like Warrior 2, she stacks her front knee over the ankle and turns the back foot in at 45 degrees. However, her stance is shoulder wide (bow stance), and she distributes her weight unevenly, about 60 percent on the front foot and 40 percent on the back foot. The torso is mostly upright. The front arm extends in front of the body as the other pushes out from the shoulder at a comfortable angle (approximately 135 degrees from the front arm). The front palm is turned at a slight angle, and the back hand forms a “hook hand.” She stabilizes the posture by keeping her hips diagonally open. She roots her lower body while keeping her upper body relaxed and fluid. Her uneven weighting allows her to move in all directions: right, left, forward, or back. In both poses the back leg is straight and the body upright. A significant difference is the hips. In Single Whip, the player keeps her hips naturally open (angled) rather than squaring them to the side as in Warrior 2.

Contrasting Warrior 2 and Single Whip, we find the hand shape, the angle of the arms by the shoulders, the direction of the hips, and the width of the stance are different. In yoga, the arms and hands often are held in straight lines to provide a clear, linear structure to all the limbs. Hand shape is often flat with the palm facing the floor or palm facing palm. Tai chi follows Master Yang Zhenduo’s 20 Character Motto: “Extend the elbows outward; leave a hollow in the armpits. The elbows pull down the tops of the shoulders, connect the wrists and carry along the fingers.” This structure creates a more rounded arm shape.

BREATHING

In tai chi we are advised to breathe naturally, which means from the diaphragm. That leaves how and when to breathe up to the player. Yoga instructors, in contrast, coach their students when to breathe in and out while moving into and out of parts of an asana. Doing repetitions of one asana one finds that in each movement the inhale is often when the chest opens forward and the exhale when the chest closes and the back curves outward.

IS ONE BETTER?

That’s a personal choice. Some people like the tension and stillness of yoga, others the more relaxed and fluid choreography of tai chi. “Both use movement, breath, balance, and focus to calm the body, mind, and spirit,” Laura Lacy points out.

SO WHY NOT DO BOTH?

The health benefits of both are the reason Karen Hunt encourages people to practice yoga and tai chi. Each improves balance, range of motion, and breath awareness. They also promote well-being, relaxation, and social interaction.

Mike Maney agrees, “Since both arts involve ‘mind and body coordination,’ I recommend that people practice both. Each art helps, not hinders, the other. Tai chi provides martial training while yoga provides a more therapeutic approach to healing and strengthening the body and mind.”

While it’s the student’s responsibility to stay focused in both, the slower pace of yoga can be distracting, cautions Tom Ryll. Despite the instructor’s harping about setting aside the day’s concerns to “be in the moment,” the slower pace of yoga, allows time for students’ minds to wander. “When practicing tai chi students must concentrate on what they are doing,” he said. “A moment’s inattention is all it takes to make a splendid mess of one’s sequence.” ☯



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