

Learning *Real* Tai Chi It's Harder than you Think!

By Doc-Fai Wong

Good tai chi is based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of certain basic principles. If you don't have those, your tai chi will never be the real thing.

Of all Chinese marital arts, tai chi chuan is probably the hardest to learn — not because tai chi is a difficult *high-level* martial art, but because of the way it is usually taught.

Most tai chi classes are follow-the-leader types of instruction, based on the principle that eventually you will absorb enough from watching and imitating others to get it right. That's all right if your teacher spends plenty of time explaining basic footwork and body movement, then sets a good example by applying those basics in his form movements.

Unfortunately, many do otherwise. Eager to expound on their own knowledge and afraid of boring more advanced students, many tai chi instructors give beginning instruction a quick once over on the way to more *enlightened* information. Well, guess what?

Good tai chi form is dependent upon a thorough knowledge and understanding of certain basic principles. If you don't have those, you tai chi will never be the real thing. Let's take a look at those foundation basics from the ground up.

Footwork

When in most stationary positions, your feet should be approximately a shoulder's-width apart. You can find this distance by standing

with both feet together. Now turn the front part of your feet and toes as far out as they will go, while keeping the heels together. Then do the same for the back section and heels, without moving the toes. This places your feet at a shoulder's-width apart.

Since it's difficult for beginning students to know the right distance, imagine there are three straight lines shooting out on the ground in front of you. The first and third lines are a shoulder's-width apart. Your feet rest on these lines — No. 1 and 3. The No. 2 line is exactly midway between the other first and third lines.

When moving forward keep your feet on the imaginary lines one and three, never stepping outside those lines or inside to the No. 2 line. The only exceptions are when moving backward, as in *repulse monkey*, and certain positions where your weight is entirely on the back leg, such as *stork spreads its wings* and *play the fiddle*. In those instances, the foot stepping backward and the foot bearing no weight are placed on line two.

Follow those principles with three imaginary lines in front of you, and you should have no trouble with the correct width of your tai chi footwork.

The length between your feet is determined by how far forward you can step without lurching, while keeping your spine straight and

your body weight in a straight line over your center of gravity. In other words, if you have to lean forward or backward to avoid ungracefully slamming your front foot down, you are probably stepping out too far. Your stance is also too long if you must drag your back foot before you can pick it up.

Your tai chi stance is too short if your back is straight and your front knee extends forward beyond an imaginary perpendicular line over the toes of the same foot. Your forward knee should always line up directly over that leg's toes. Although not the only reason for the knee extending too far forward, a stance which is too short will push the knee over the toes.

Unless you are moving from one stance to another, your back foot should always have firm contact with the ground. Don't roll it forward or pick up the heel. This weakens your balance and power, pushing your body weight forward of your center of gravity. Keep the back foot flat on the ground until it's time to move it to another position.

Torso

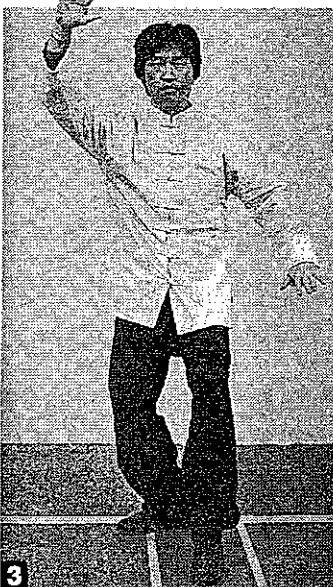
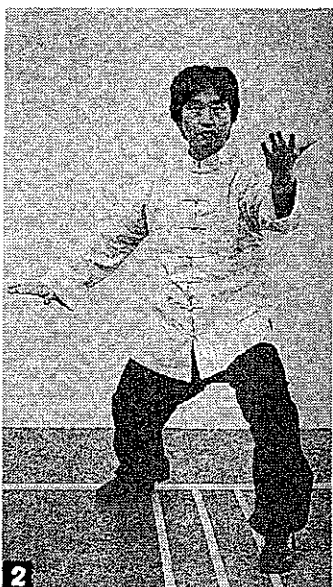
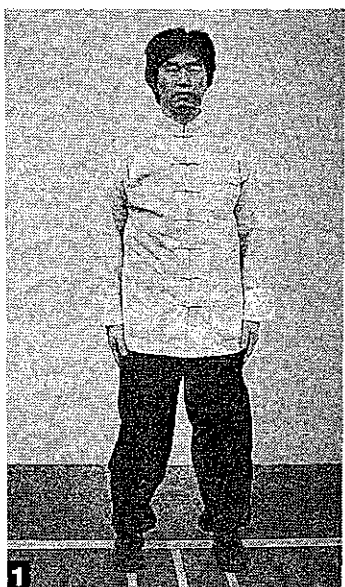
Your lower back (sacrum area) should always be straight — never swayed. The lower back is the connection between your legs and upper body. If it sways outward your connection is broken. Then your power is strictly shoulder and arm power, with no waist, hip or leg connection.

You can check your lower back posture by placing one hand on your lower back while you are standing in a tai chi posture. Your lower back should be absolutely straight. Any curvature indicates an incorrect lower back posture.

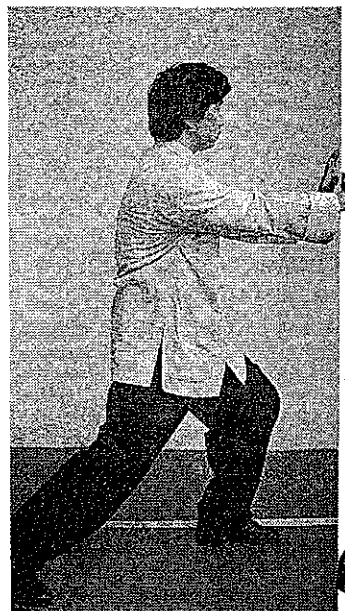
If you do have a swaying back, you can correct it by pushing your lower back outward — as if you are doing *crunch sit-ups*. When doing crunch sit-ups, you maintain contact with the floor by pushing your lower back outward against the floor. The tai chi lower back position



This is an example of correct foot width while moving from one stance to another. Doc-Fai Wong starts from brush knee with one foot on line one and the other on line three (1). As he moves forward into the next brush knee, he brings his leg over into line two, keeping the knee of that leg pointing straight ahead (2). Then he finishes his move into a brush knee with one foot on line one and one on line three, with both feet a shoulder's-width apart (3).



Doc-Fai Wong demonstrates the correct width (1). Notice that his feet are positioned on the outer two lines, Nos. 1 and 3. Next is shown the correct width of the feet in the tai chi stance partition the wild horse's mane (2). Again the feet are on lines one and three. And finally, correct foot width in the tai chi stance stork spreads his wings (3). Notice all the weight is on the back leg—the supporting foot is on line one, with the weightless or forward foot on line one.



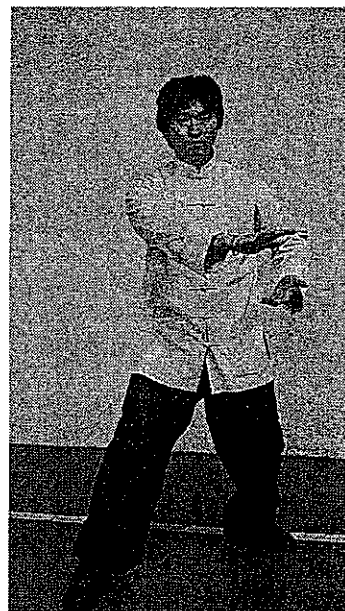
Incorrect back position. Lower back is swayed outward.



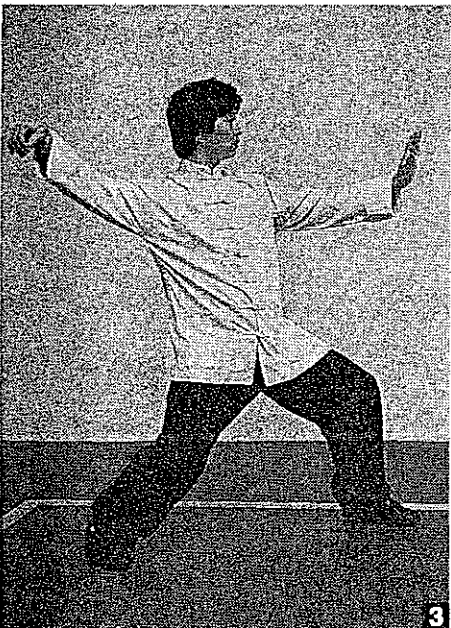
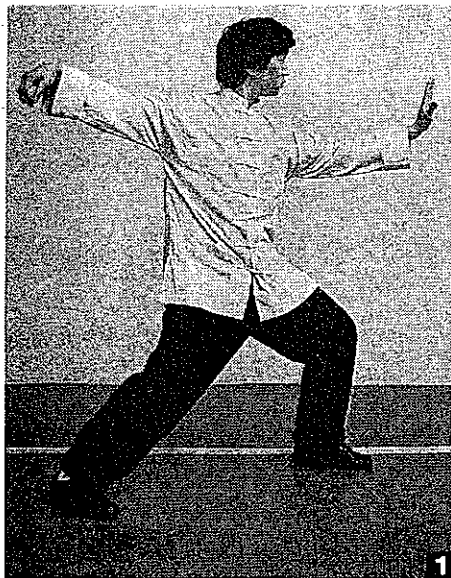
Correct back position. Spine is straight, lower back relaxed and straight.



Correct waist and hip position for roll back. Notice the waist and hips are turned, rather than just turning the arms.



Incorrect roll back position. Waist and hips are not turning, only the arms and shoulders turn.



Correct straight spine for single whip position (1). Incorrect spine position, leaning too far forward (2). Incorrect single whip position, leaning back too far (3).

is similar, except you are standing upright.

Another method is to stand against a wall, with your feet about one inch away from the wall. Push your lower back outward, against the wall until you cannot slide your hand between your back and the wall. This is the correct tai chi position.

Old-time Chinese tai chi masters have noted, "The waist carries the hands." They meant the hands do not independently move of the waist and hip. In other words, your waist and hips must turn 45 degrees to one side before your hands can perform a movement at that angle. For instance, in the *grasp bird's tail* movement called *roll back*, you should not move your hands to the side without turning the waist. As the waist turns, your hands merely act as inanimate attachments, performing their roll-back functions.

The rest of your spine should be straight, creating even energy flow and relaxed movements. Don't lean too far forward or backward. Don't hunch your shoulders forward too much.

"Many tai chi teachers give beginning instruction a quick once over on the way to more *enlightened* information."

Always keep your shoulders, chest and elbows relaxed and down. Don't raise or hunch your shoulders. Don't stick your elbows out like a bird in flight. Don't stick your chest out in a military attention position. Keep them relaxed and down.

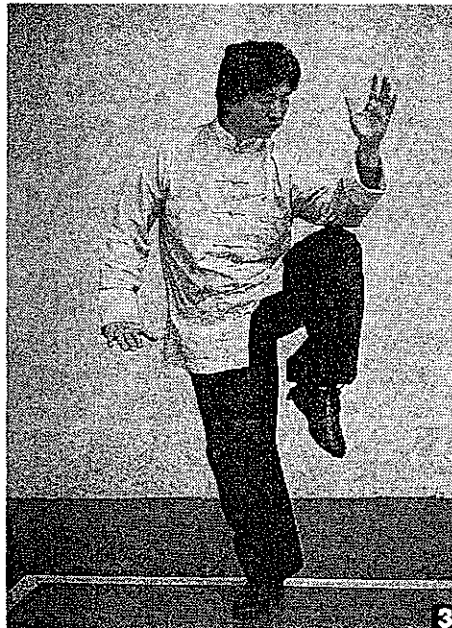
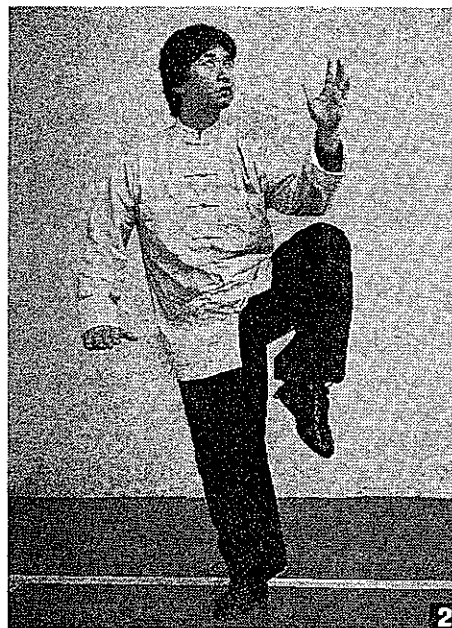
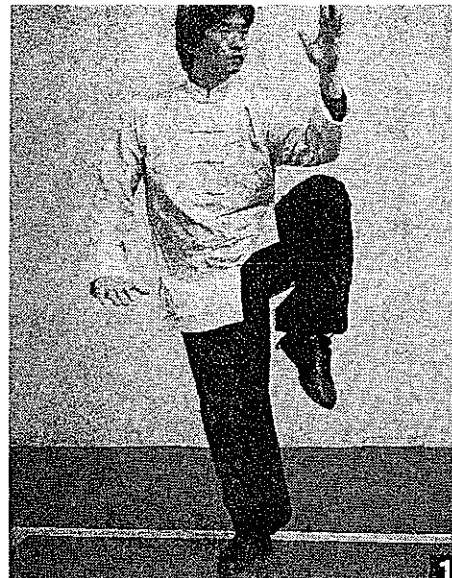
Raising the shoulder, elbows or chest interferes with natural, even breathing. Most people don't know how to breathe evenly. Under stress or when fatigued, they exhale for longer periods than they inhale. Correct tai chi practice teaches them to breathe calmly and evenly. However, raising the shoulders, elbows or chest prevents natural breathing.

Head

Your eyes should be level. Don't look up or down. Ancient tai chi writings describe that your spirit (*shen*) is directed wherever your eyes focus. If you look down, it is directed down. You can bring your eyes to a level position by slightly tucking your chin, while slightly pushing your head upward.

While these basics may sound like plenty to remember, you won't be practicing correct tai chi without them. They are the foundations of tai chi body dynamics. If you don't follow them, you're just doing a slow-motion dance.

About the Author: Doc-Fai Wong is a contributing editor of Inside Kung-Fu.



Correct eye position in golden rooster stands on one leg (1). Incorrect eye position, eyes looking up (2). Incorrect eye position, eyes looking down (3).

WRITTEN BY CLAIR HAMILL

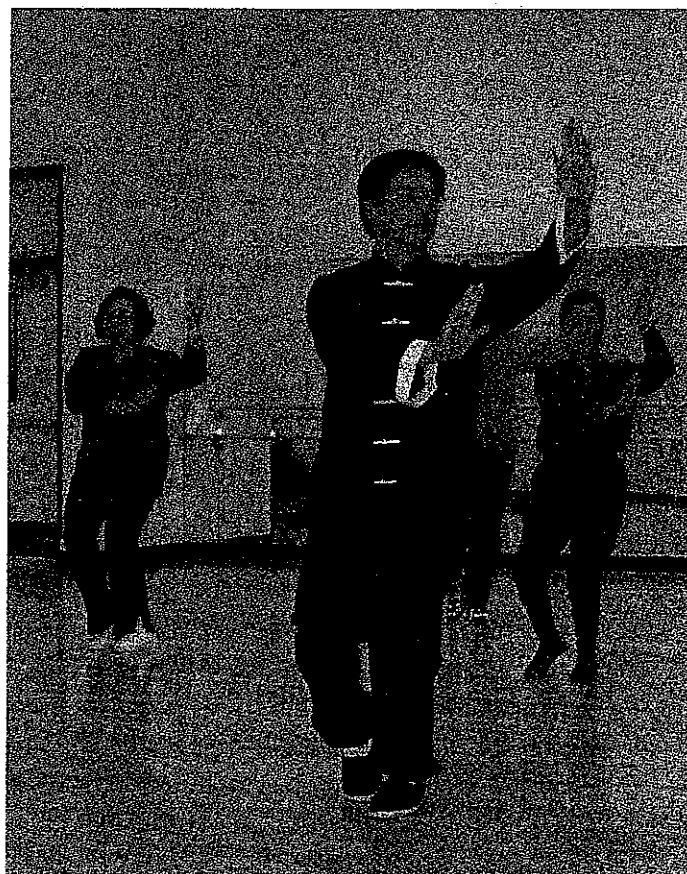
TAI CHI

TAI CHI AND its many variations have existed in China and other eastern countries for thousands of years. Modern Tai Chi as practiced in the West has been around for several hundred years and the roots of this practice can be argued to have existed for several thousand years. Yet, ask the common person on the street what Tai Chi is and very few will have an answer, and most of those that do will tend to erroneously think it something like Yoga for old people. So, how can something that has existed for anywhere from a couple hundred to several thousand years still be unknown to the western world?

Part of the answer is that Tai Chi originated in China where the art and its uses (both martial and health) were kept secret for hundreds and thousands of years. The Chinese recognized the important benefits and skills of Tai Chi and were very protective of that knowledge. Consequently few people in the outside world ever knew of its existence. It has only been within the last several hundred years that masters from China branched out and brought Tai Chi to the world outside the borders of China.

Another part to the answer is that Tai Chi isn't just one art, one sport, one concept, or one process. It is many arts, sports, concepts, processes, and philosophies. Thus, we in the West can easily overlook it as we tend to prefer single things to work on or explore. Tai Chi exists all around us, yet we've narrowed our vision so much that we can't see it. This is very much akin to the saying that a person can't see the forest for the trees.

So, what exactly is Tai Chi? Well, Tai Chi at its core is an internal martial arts form. When applied by a master, Tai Chi is on a par with the external martial arts such as Kung Fu and Karate and can be just as devastating. More commonly though, Tai Chi is practiced for health benefits. When studied properly, Tai Chi will bring peace, harmony, and balance into a person's life. The stretching and physical movements of the form build strength, balance, and correct body alignment for the student. Because it is done at a slow pace and in a relaxed manner, it is low impact and can be practiced by students of any age. The emphasis is on relaxing the body, breath, and mind so that tension and worries can be released and the internal energies of the body be allowed to flow freely.



Just as important as the physical movement of Tai Chi are the mental and meditative aspects that are taught. Tai Chi is often referred to as meditation in action. The student slows and calms the breathing, relaxes the body, and meditates while moving throughout the form. This practice has been shown to reduce stress for the student at work, at home, and at play. Peace and harmony is accomplished by teaching the student to not only relax the body, but the mind and spirit as well. Thus, when faced with stressful situation—whether physical, mental, or emotional—the Tai Chi student is able to yield and deflect what is negative and work toward the advantage of what is positive.

Tai Chi is ultimately about embracing change. Tai Chi students discover over time that every part of their being has changed and will continue to do so. This change affects the physical body, intellectual and emotional state of the mind and the spirit. Students learn about their body and how they hold and express it, and what changes may need to be made. Exploring the mind, students learn how they handle various situations and what changes are necessary to more easily deal with those situations when they arise again. Spiritually, students are taught to open and expand their awareness, let go of the ego, and embrace who they are.

In this way, Tai Chi can be thought of as a tool for exploring and peeling away the layers of life. With each moment of study and practice, Tai Chi students learn something more about themselves and also learn that there is more to explore. Tai Chi is a never-ending process of practice and learning. There is never an ending, just more beginnings. **AZH**

The Importance of Song

By Alex Yeo

The practice of Tai Chi requires the whole body to be relaxed, and joints to be stretched and open. Not only the body, but also the mind should be still and relaxed. Song is Tai Chi's unique point, and is also an essential internal and external (body) requirement.

(There is no direct English word to translate the Chinese word song. The nearest would be relax, but it also means to be loose and supple).

What we should note here is that 'song' refers to a natural absence of unnecessary tension; not limp or lifeless, yet similar to a drunken state (ever tried lifting up a drunken person?)

One can look at being song as this—other than the necessary tension to hold oneself up, all other mental and physical actions or muscles are void of tension.

Song and tension are opposites of each other. To put it very simply, every physical movement is the result of the tension and relaxation caused in the contraction and expansion of the muscles.

Damaged muscles can lose the ability to balance this contraction and expansion, e.g., a burnt arm can result in the hand being unable to open or close fully or normally, or an arm being totally paralyzed.

Practicing Tai Chi is somewhat similar. If the ability to relax and tense is not balanced well, it is difficult to perform the postures correctly.

Tai Chi movements should lead from 'song' to suppleness, being natural and comfortable, connecting with each other without breaks

Alex Yeo practices and teaches in Singapore.

or stops (much like sea waves flowing on the beach).

This 'song' should start from the intention, or the 'yi.' As the Classics say, "Use the intention, not the strength."

When practicing, relax the mind and the intention. Use them to guide each individual body part (breath, muscle, joint, skin etc.) to relax and dissolve all unnecessary tension, until "no body [part] that should be tense is song, and no body [part] that should be 'song' is tense."

When practicing a set quickly, it is common to tense up and lose the song state, which is why one reason for practicing the set slowly is so that one can be aware of one's own body while moving, taking note of any part that is unnecessarily tense. As such, we have this seemingly contradictory requirement to achieve song (stillness) through movement (tension).

After a long period of practice, one can be song both in the mind and in the body even in fast movements. This is also how "to be song even in the face of stressful and nervous environments" can be achieved.

Song and Tension

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kind of rest for tension. There is a direct link between relaxation and the relief from fatigue. There is also a link with increasing strength, endurance (physical and mental), speed (in movement and thought) nimbleness and skill (physical and mental).

We seek a complete relaxation when practicing Tai Chi.

Stillness the mind and directing the intention to relax the entire body is an important and the main health method, together with deep abdominal breathing, used in seated meditation, moving meditation, qigong etc. since ancient Chinese times.

This way, we can say that Tai Chi shares similar roots with the traditional Chinese health arts.

Song comes from using the intention, not limp, not lifeless, and not without using the mind, or in layman's term, totally switched off. It is relaxed, yet aware.

As an example, it is not uncommon to see a practitioner carrying 'relaxation' to the extreme in performing his movements with absolutely no strength or life in his body i.e. his spirit is not raised up.

In such a case, one needs only to give him a gentle push with a finger and down he will fall (the other extreme of being too tense is also true).

He will also feel that he cannot balance himself, swaying to the left or right and constantly trying to maintain his balance.

It is like a person who is very, very sleepy and is on his way walking to his bedroom (it happened to me before!).

The sleepy person's body may be relaxed, but his mind is already somewhere else (in dreamland?) and hence his steps are unstable

and shaky.

Song is Not the Goal

In Tai Chi, song, therefore, is an absence of all unnecessary tension, or total lack of brute strength. Physical and energy movements are executed according to the rules of the individual postures, with intention behind every move.

Practiced long enough one will develop an energy that is both light and nimble, yet deep and heavy, full of elasticity and resilience, pliable but strong.

When the skin is relaxed, skin sensitivity greatly increases, thereby improving the 'listening' requirements of push hands. As the Classics say, "A feather cannot be added, a fly cannot land," meaning that the skin immediately detects and is weighed down by the mere touch of a feather or a fly.

I find a similarity in a newspaper report on a table-tennis player in the last SEA Games. I find it hard to believe but he claims that when a player has played long enough, he can sense if the ball he hits has even that small speck of dirt or drop of perspiration.

I thought, "If he can sense it through a hard table tennis bat, what more sensing through our very own skin?"

However, these cannot be attained overnight, but require long periods of correct and diligent hard work through being still and song in performing the set and pushing hands. I cannot emphasize enough. Practice not mindlessly, but with intention and an aim in mind. No result will come with mindless practice no matter how hard and how long.

However, song is not the goal of Tai Chi. The Classics say that we move "from relaxation to suppleness, and from suppleness to hardness, and back to suppleness again until both hardness and suppleness

are merged as one."

This is seen in the Taiji diagram, where both the white and black parts are equal. Being song is not the ends, but the means to this goal.

One Training Method

I would like to share one method of training song, i.e., using every transitional posture as a zhan zhuang (standing pole) practice.

For example, in the posture Press, the transitional movement from Squeeze is to sit back on the left leg and placing the hands in front of the waist, ready to move forward into 'Press.'

Stop when you're sitting back, and mentally scan through your entire body noting any tensed areas where there should be none. Direct your intention to physically and mentally relax every muscle and joint, even those straining under your body weight.

Tension is very often caused by holding the wrong body structure. Make sure that your posture aligns with the requirements e.g. straight back, head up, hold the back and draw the chest etc.

Most importantly, watch your breathing. Improper breathing can also cause tension. Make sure it is natural and not strained. Sink it down to the lower abdominals as much as possible but without forcing. An out-breath longer than the

Another trick to improve on song is to use the mind instead of the muscles. To give one example, in Raise Hands, imagine the arms to be filled with helium like a balloon, and like a helium-filled balloon it becomes so light that the arms naturally float up.

in-breath helps one to relax more. Mentally sink down lower and lower into the ground with each out-breath.

Do this for as long as you have to. Don't rush through it. Once you are satisfied that you are doing it correctly, then transit to the next posture and repeat the process.

Another trick to improve on song is to use the mind instead of the muscles.

To give one example, in Raise Hands, imagine the arms to be filled with helium like a balloon, and like a helium-filled balloon it becomes so light that the arms naturally float up.

Practice this a couple of times until your arms really feels as if they are weightless and floating. Are there any muscles used? Of course, but it feels as if there were none. Try it.

Another Test

One way to test if we're truly song in our practice is to do this: practice the set for an hour non-stop and after that, check if your muscles are feeling strained and sore? Do it for another hour, and another. What about now?

If we are devoid of excessive and unnecessary tension then theoretically there should be no opportunity for the muscles to be strained or sore.

Consider the analogy of being immersed in water. The waters will hold and support your body, and where the water flows your body, or body parts will go along accordingly.

After a long session of this activity will your muscles be sore? Of course not.

Though there were physical movements but those movements were supported. Could this be what Cheng Man-Ching meant when he said to practice as if swimming in air?

Benefits of Being Song

The principle of being song in the entire mind and body is also vital to good health. There is a strong connection between the principles of "use the intention and still the mind" and "song both the internal and external body." It also explains why a martial art such as Tai Chi can be so beneficial to building up one's health and physical fitness, preventing and curing illnesses.

Tai Chi's song refers not just to the physical skin, muscles or joints, but also the mind, intention and the internal organs, all of which must be relaxed at the same time.

There are many good benefits to being song that can be carried over to our daily lives:

1. We often carry around a lot of stress and tension with us, be it in work, play or even rest, especially in today's busy society. These stress and tension are often subconscious, and the conscious practice of song will help us to dig right into the core, identify the areas of stress and tension and remove them.

As we know, stress is a major cause of many major diseases. This removal will help in preventing the onset of diseases.

2. Some medical patients, especially those with major diseases, are often easily nervous, tensed and agitated. Even when at rest, it is not uncommon to see them display acts of tension such as clenching the fists, biting the teeth, stiffening the shoulders etc.

Likewise, the conscious practice of song will help them to relax, thereby relieving their nervous conditions, and increasing the ability to relax some more, and the good cycle carries on.

This is also one reason why practicing Tai Chi is so beneficial to those with medical conditions.

3. As earlier mentioned, since

song is a kind of rest for tension and aids greatly in the relief of fatigue, it therefore speeds up the rate of recovery after an intense physical session.

The nervous system is rested faster and strength returns quicker, too. It also reduces the occurrence of sore muscles.

From personal experience I don't get any sore muscles when I practice Tai Chi after an intense run, without the stretching that my runner friends insist on. And they still get sore muscles even after cool-down and stretch!).

This is one reason why some practitioners insist on practicing at least once before sleep no matter how tired they may be after a hard day's work since it helps them recover faster and better for the next day.

From personal experience I don't get any sore muscles when I practice Tai Chi after an intense run, without the stretching that my runner friends insist on.

4. Next, song allows the nervous system to relax, promoting smooth flow of qi and allowing a break from its daily function. It also supports and does not impede abdominal breathing, again allowing qi to flow through the major meridians that pass through the abdominal area and carrying out a self-massage effect to the internal organs.

5. In any kind of movement, the body uses up nutrients from its internal stores (obtained from food, air etc.) and after using them, it then excretes the resultant wastes from the body. These happen at the same time, and this activity increases according to the intensity of the physical movement (going to work,

exercising etc.).

During moments of tension, the body's energy is directed to meet this threat instead of doing its rightful work. Being song, therefore, will result in the increased efficiency of the detoxification process since more resources then becomes available for use.

The muscles and joints being open and loose will also help improve the flow of energy. Being relaxed also opens up the blood vessels and let it flow much better.

End result is that bodily wastes are more readily expelled while nutrients are more readily absorbed. More importantly, the qi can flow unobstructed and unimpeded.

An analogy would be this: Consider two towels. One is made of a soft material (e.g. cotton) and the other a hard one (synthetic). Which can soak in water faster and better? When both are soaked, which is easier to squeeze dry?

6. Beginning students of Tai Chi, actually, beginning students of any kind of learning, are often nervous because of their unfamiliarity of the subject. They bring into the learning their previous wrong habits of thinking, of movement, of mindset, etc. Fear of making mistakes and learning new or more difficult movements can also stress them.

All these contribute to the tension and stiffness often found in beginning students. Consciously practicing song will remove these. As one becomes more familiar with the subject, just as a visitor becomes more familiar with a new environment, one becomes more relaxed, and the ability to song also proportionately increases.

7. Being relaxed causes the entire skeletal frame and internal organs to sink down, thereby increasing the sustaining and sup-

porting capabilities of the lower body. At the same time, the qi is able to sink down to the dantian and stabilize the center of gravity.

8. Combat-wise, being song is a requirement for fast and explosive execution of martial techniques.

All martial artists know that relaxed movements are much faster than tensed ones. Once the mind decides to execute the movement, the relaxed body can respond immediately. The tensed body however has to first relax before responding, increasing reaction time in the process.

9. Lastly, practiced long enough, song allows the practitioner to develop the iron wrapped in cotton body.

An analogy would be a well-crafted Japanese sword. It first goes through hundreds, if not thousands of layering and hammering of the metal until it becomes the highly desired hard, yet pliable, steel.

The body of a practitioner well trained in song is at once soft, yet hard. His limbs would be a water bag that is almost full—heavy, yet soft and lively. This softness is however not ‘soft,’ just try using the water bag to hit yourself!

The Relation to Stillness

Song cannot exist by itself. It exists in correlation to stillness.

Many practitioners, although they know that they must song in their practice, they however have difficulties translating head knowledge into actual reality.

Most only know how to relax their bodies in practice such that the physical movements look gentle and pretty.

But there will still be some pockets of tension left somewhere in the body, especially when he keeps fearing that he is not song enough and tries hard to song further.

This, however, results only in further tension. Even if the body is relaxed, the mental tension is still lingering around.

Past masters call this situation “no strength in the waist and legs.” The problem then arises when we take these terms literally and start training our legs which result in muscular legs that are full of tension, i. e., we miss the point completely.

Actually, the main obstacle to song in these situations is the mental part. People are like that—the more anxious you are to song the more you actually head in the opposite direction.

The key then is to be still (jing, also translated as calm, or quiet). This is the key to achieving song.

Just to mentally will for song will not do, one must also intentionally disperse the tension from the body at the same time.

The practice of Tai Chi must first and foremost involve stillness. This is not a forceful direction on the heart to be still, but the gentle calming of the anxious heart until it is empty.

Just to mentally will for song will not do, one must also intentionally disperse the tension from the body at the same time.

Song and tension dispersion must go together. If you cannot song you cannot disperse, and vice versa. The relationship between these two and how they affect each other must be adequately understood in order to achieve the aim of song.

The first step is to know where to disperse the tension. Do not think that relaxing the shoulders mean sinking the tension down to

the hips, and relaxing the hips mean sinking the tension down to the soles. So, relaxing the soles, where do you sink the tension to?

As two sayings go, “sink into the ground” and “let the ground support your weight.” As previously mentioned, these terms are not to be understood literally.

More often than not, the result is that the tension remains stuck at the soles and the practitioner has to carry it around, resulting in the inability of the body to thoroughly song.

Look at it this way; imagine the body to be a multi-story building and every level has offices and equipment in them.

The goal of song and disperse is to empty every level of everything except the bare minimal building structures. You don’t move any equipment upstairs or downstairs. Moving the equipment will only shift the load to that next level.

The way to song and disperse is to release all tension all around your body horizontally and all around. One way to do this is to imagine that you are covered in a cocoon, and your tension is dispersed all around through your cocoon.

Guide the intention and qi to disperse everything out of the body until nothing is left behind.

Conclusion

That said, is it easy to be song? No. though the above concepts were explained to me and I understand them intellectually, I am still working to translate intellectual understanding to physical reality.

However, even if we still have a long way to go before achieving song, and I would be the first to confess to that, having an idea of what to expect and what to work towards will help develop focus in our practice. •

Form as the Foundation of T'ai Chi Practice

By Ma Hong

Translated by Tu-Ky Lam from an article in Chinese by Ma Hong.

The foundation work of Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan) is in the Taiji (T'ai Chi) form itself. In other words, only through practicing the Taiji form can you gain the full benefits of Taijiquan, be it for health, for self-defense or for art appreciation. The more you practice the form, the better foundation you will have.

Chen Pin-san, a great master of the 16th generation of the Chen family, once said, "Practice ten thousand reps, and you will come to understand Taijiquan." Grandmaster Chen Fa-ke practiced 30 reps a day throughout most of his life. Wu style Taijiquan founder Wu Jian-quan asked his students to try to do ten thousands reps in three years.

My teacher, master Chen Zhao-kui (son of Chen Fa-ke) said, "The practice of the form is the most important foundation work because the form is the end result of the accumulative fighting experience. Most martial arts in their early stage are only single postures. These postures grow in numbers, and they become a martial art form. Practicing the form will enable you to defend yourself in a fight."

He also said: "The form is the foundation of push hands; push hands is a device for testing the correctness of the form; and push hands is a bridge between the form and free fighting. Doing push hands without practicing the form produce some skill in self-defense, but without the foundation work you cannot keep on improving, and raise your skill to a higher level."

Why did the grand masters in the past put so much emphasis on practicing the form? Because it is only through practicing the form that you can get the benefit of good health, self-defense, and enjoyment of a great

From the viewpoint of martial art, although push hands is an indispensable part of Taiji training, there are a lot of postures in the Taiji form which are very useful in free fighting. Kicking, striking with elbows, etc. are not allowed in push hands competition. In free fighting, some techniques are forbidden as well. Yet all of these are contained in the Taiji form.

martial art. If you practice Taijiquan for health, you still have to practice the form to activate the circulation of your internal energy.

From the viewpoint of martial art, although push hands is an indispensable part of Taiji training, there are a lot of postures in the Taiji form which are very useful in free fighting. Kicking, striking with elbows, etc. are not allowed in push hands competition. In free fighting, some techniques are forbidden as well.

Yet all of these are contained in the Taiji form. You can learn and develop the fighting skill from practicing the form. For (martial) art appreciation, you will have to practice the form, without which people cannot appreciate the gracefulness, beauty, etc., of Taijiquan. In short, we can say without the form there is no Taijiquan.

Six Characteristics of Taijiquan.

To be a good Taiji practitioner, your Taiji form should comply to the following characteristics: correct postures, flowing internal energy, clear martial arts application, strong flexibility, elegant appearance, and consistency with Taiji theory.

I. Correct form

Like learning calligraphy or painting, when learning Taijiquan there is a

period when you have to copy your teacher's movements. Your movements will have to be correct. This period is crucial to your future development. The instruction of your teacher is also important. As the saying goes, "Like teacher, like student." Therefore, whether you are teaching or learning, you must not take it (this period) lightly.

The correct Taiji form should meet the following requirements:

1. Keep the body upright. You should also bear these points in mind: when you bend your knees, they should not go past your toes. Your crotch should be round and loose. Relax (draw in) your chest and sink your waist. Suspend your head-top, and loosen your shoulders, and drop your elbows. Your energy should sink as well. This requirement is the most important of all.

2. Pay attention to the starting, middle and finishing points of each move so that you can do them correctly.

3. Make sure you are clear of "chan si jing" (silk reeling force): whether it is "shun chan" (turn your palms out) or "ni chan" (turn your palms in).

4. Pay attention to your steps and stances, including the "shun chan" and "ni chan" of your legs.

5. As for the opening and closing of your chest and waist, you should know how much to turn and in which direction to turn.

6. When shifting weight, make sure your crotch moves in a lower curve (like the bottom of a wok), and know where your weight is. You should also be clear how you move your hips in accordance with the weight shift.

7. Know where you should look.

8. Breathe properly with the movement.

If you keep the above points in mind and practice in accordance with these rules, you should be able to improve quickly. Otherwise you will be struggling all the way.

II. Total internal force

If you practice the form correctly, your "nei jing" or internal force will gradually develop. What is "nei jing" then? "Nei jing," or internal force, is the total strength of the body, the energy and the mind. It is very similar to

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the ordinary force or strength. The difference is in that "nei jing" is more flexible. It has the following characteristics.

1. It is the complete force of the whole body, which is achieved through the proper co-ordination of the body, arms and legs. Our whole body should be relaxed, and our toes cling to the ground. We can stamp the floor and make use of the force which bounces back from the feet and goes all the way to the body.

2. This force is generated by the internal circling of "dantian" (lower abdomen). Whenever you move, your movements should originate from "dantian." In other words, they should be controlled by your waist. "If your waist does not move, you do not move," or "if the inside (dantian) does not move, the outside should not move."

The Taiji classics say, "The most important thing is that everything should be conducted (including deflecting and counter attacking) from the chest and the waist," which is actually carried out from "dantian." The internal circling of "dantian" can have very great benefit to health.

3. It requires the close coordination of breathing with the movements.

4. It is a well-balanced force consisting of both hard and soft. Wang Zong-yue (Tsung-Yueh), in his "Taijiquan Lun" said, "Yin and Yang mutually aid and change each other. Then you can say you understand jing (internal strength)." The Taiji form consists of the hard and the soft, opening and closing, substantial and insubstantial, which are intermixed with each other. In push hands, there is the mixture of deflecting and attacking at the same time. All this shows how Yin and Yang are at work in Taijiquan.

5. It is a spiral force produced by "shun chan" and "ni chan." "Chan si jing," or silk reeling force, is produced not just through turning the hands or arms, but rather by turning the whole body: arms, legs and waist. That is why you can see a practitioner, when he practices Taijiquan, move spirally up and down. "Chan si jing" not only helps your energy circulate fluently through the energy path in your body, but also sends out a strong force. It is the essence of Taijiquan. The fact that a

The Taiji classics say, "The most important thing is that everything should be conducted (including deflecting and counter-attacking) from the chest and the waist," which is actually carried out from "dantian." The internal circling of "dantian" can have very great benefit to health.

Taiji practitioner is able to stick and follow, deflect and hit back at the same time, depends largely on "Chan si jing" or spiral force. The reason why practicing Taijiquan can activate the flowing of your energy and regulate the function of your internal organs is also due to this force.

6. It is an overlapped force. Your internal force moves to the left first if it wants to go the right and vice versa; and in the same manner, it will go up first if it wants to come down and vice versa. In other words, it moves from the opposite direction first, and the movements of the chest and waist, such as their opening and closing, work in the same manner, too.

7. It is a well-balanced force, which requires the practitioner to sink his right waist and leg slightly if his power charge is to the left, and vice versa. His waist should move back if he discharges power to the front.

8. It is a force which moves from one section (or joint) of the body to another, very similar to the movements of a worm.

9. It is a well coordinated three-section force: top, middle and bottom. (Translator note: the three sections can refer to the whole body: upper part, middle part and bottom part. They can also refer to your limbs, such as your arms: shoulder, elbow and palm. When one part of the body is attacked, the other two parts will have to give their support. For example, if you grab my hand, I would strike you with my elbow and even with my shoulder if close enough. When practicing the solo form, you should show that your internal power comes through the shoulder,

elbow and then hand. Of course, it comes from the feet first, and then the waist and shoulders.)

10. It is a force that enables you to be well-centered or balanced by shifting your body weight.

11. It is a force produced from the waist that moves down first and then upward. (One of the characteristics of "chan si jing").

12. It is a spring-like force which is flexible and explosive. The above characteristics of internal force is acquired through the correct and diligent practice of Taijiquan.

III. Clear martial arts application

Taijiquan is a martial art, no more and no less. As such, its martial arts application is its soul or main concern. The Taiji classics say, "practicing the form is practicing fighting." Therefore, martial arts application is the most important element of Taijiquan. While practicing the Taiji form, you should:

1. Know the position of yourself and that of your opponent. Make sure that you know when and where he wants to attack.

2. Try to understand the martial arts application of each move; whether it is used to neutralize or to attack, and whether it is ward off, roll back, press or push, etc. This will enable you to practice with a sense of purpose, thus clearly showing you are doing a martial art form, not a dance or a fitness exercise.

IV. Flexible strength

Whether you practice Taijiquan for health, for self-defense, or for art's sake, you should show great strength. The saying "use mind and not force" is not complete. Emphasizing the use of the mind is right but not to use force is incorrect, as using mind can produce force. Your Taiji form should show such qualities as strength, speed, resilience, and liveliness. Otherwise it is not a sport. Your Taiji strength should have these characteristics: a mixture of Yin and Yang, force of the whole body, force produced by "shun chan" and "ni chan," and spring-like force, of which the spiral force, spring force and the force produced by the mind and "dantian" are of special value. How can you train to increase this flexible strength? I recommend that you work hard on the following:

1. Increase the time of your practice. Practice at least ten reps a day so

that you can do ten thousand reps in three years.

2. Keep your postures low to increase your durability and strength. My teacher Chen Zhao-kui called the low postures training the "moving stance" training. It can increase the flexibility and durability of the joints in your shoulders, hips, knees and ankles, making the co-ordination of all the joints in the whole body possible.

3. Practice single movements many times. Do them with "fa-jing," meaning power discharge. You may require your teacher's help with this practice, which mainly suits young, energetic people.

4. You should do push hands to strengthen your agility and flexibility. Push hands can help you sense your opponent's force so that you can follow and make use of it, or neutralize and counter-attack at the same time.

5. You should compliment your Taiji form with power training drills to increase your internal strength. For example, practice the long staff, Taiji ball, Taiji drum, etc. You can even strike at the punch bag, but you must punch with spiral movements and spring-like force.

6. Practice with all your mind. Many scientists and martial artists have proved that the human mind can produce force. When training, imagine you are fighting with an opponent. Use your mind to induce a force to strike at your opponent. Practice in this way, and your mind can produce a strong force. This is also the reason why Taiji practitioners emphasize using mind when practicing Taijiquan.

7. Practice with varied speed: slow and fast intermixed with each other.

V. Elegant style

The traditional Chinese culture, be it calligraphy, painting, drama; music or martial arts, places a lot of emphasis on style. Taijiquan is no exception. It requires Taiji practitioners to express the true spirit of Taijiquan through their own style in the same way as other artists do. So all Taiji practitioners should be able to show their own style in their Taiji form. To achieve this goal you need to:

1. Understand the philosophy of Yin and Yang, which permeates the traditional Chinese culture and is the foundation of all their arts.

2. Understand the fighting strategy of Taijiquan: be calm and face your

Experience tells us that those who understand the Taiji theory and can put it into practice learn Taijiquan much more quickly than those who do not. Taiji theory helps people understand how Taijiquan works, and provides them with a way to learn more by themselves.

enemy. If they do not attack you, there is no need to counter-attack. If they do try to offend, you must be sure of winning the battle. Always show you are calm and confident when you are practicing Taijiquan.

3. Give good training to your mind through the practice of the solo form. You should show that you are in the best state of mind and can cope with all situations when required. So your form should be so full of energy that it shows spectators you are in great spirits. Practicing Taijiquan is not only a training of the body but also of the mind. Watching people practice Taijiquan is a great pleasure to the mind.

4. Show the rhythm of Taijiquan. The slow and the fast, the soft and the hard, opening and closing, the twisting and turning of the whole body, etc., are the basic structure of Taijiquan. They work in harmony to show the gracefulness of Taijiquan, which at times looks like flying dragon or slithering snake, and at other times is like drifting clouds or running streams.

The saying, "The whole body appears as soft and boneless, but once the energy is released, any part of the body can be used as a hand to attack," is an excellent example of this kind of rhythm.

VI. Consistency to Taiji theory

You should learn the basic Taiji theory and use it as a guide to your practice so that each movement meets the requirement of the Taiji philosophy. It would certainly help if you have a good knowledge of these:

1. The relationship between Taiji theory and the traditional Chinese philosophy.

2. Traditional Chinese medicine, - especially the part on the energy paths in the human body so that you can understand how your energy flows.

3. The relationship between Taijiquan and health.

4. Physics, which will help you better understand the internal power and martial arts application.

5. The Taiji classics. Study these carefully so that your form is correct and is consistent with the theory taught in the Taiji classics.

Experience tells us that those who understand the Taiji theory and can put it into practice learn Taijiquan much more quickly than those who do not. Taiji theory helps people understand how Taijiquan works, and provides them with a way to learn more by themselves. Good Taiji teachers should teach Taiji theory and show how it is applied in the Taiji form and push hands so that their students can continue to learn by themselves.

The Process of Taijiquan Training.

This is, in essence, the process of constantly correcting and refining your Taiji form to lift it to a high level. It involves the following:

I. Instructor breaks up the form; and students learn and copy carefully. My teacher, Master Chen Zhao-kui, when teaching private sessions, always asked his students, "Do you want to learn Taijiquan quickly or do you prefer to learn in greater details?" Indeed, learning Taijiquan can be faster or slower, and it can be sketchy or can go into details.

If the instructor can describe and demonstrate the movements clearly right from the start, and students learn them carefully, then it may take longer, say more than one year, to learn the whole form. But the overall learning process is faster. Besides, when practicing the form, try to do it slowly. Except when doing "Fa jing," where you are required to move fast, practice your form slowly - slow but not broken nor lifeless. "Low Stance + slow movement" can produce quicker results.

Chen Pin-san said, "When you have to be fast, you should be faster than your opponent; and when you need to be slow, you should also be slower than your opponent." This explains why practicing the form slowly is also

* You must be determined to improve. Every time you practice the form, try to discover what needs to be improved. Even the smallest correction or improvement counts.

important.

II. Instructor constantly corrects students' form; and students train diligently. A good teacher will produce good students. Your teacher's guidance and your fellow students' support are indispensable. Your own effort is important, too. You must be determined to improve.

Every time you practice the form, try to discover what needs to be improved. Even the smallest correction or improvement counts. It certainly helps if you can feel that you have better understanding of the Taiji form or feel you have reached another level each time you train. In other words, you must train hard and train well and improve all the time.

III. The Taiji form should be the core of your daily training; and push hands, single movements and power training drills are supplements. Practice the Taiji form every day, so that you can gain the full benefits of practicing: for health, for self-defense, and for art appreciation. The other parts of your training can be done alternately.

IV. Ways and time frame to attain the six characteristics. All I have been talking about above is the foundation work of Taijiquan. Of the six characteristics, the first one (correct form) is the starting point and should be worked at first. Then you can train to achieve the others at your own pace.

There is no need to follow the exact order as described above. But to be good at the Taiji form, you have to train really hard for three years, practicing from three to five hours every day. It also depends on your intelligence, your patience, and the guidance of your teacher.

Once you have got the foundation laid down, it is all up to you whether you want to build a ten-story building, a twenty-story building, or a skyscraper. •

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Mental Discipline in T'ai Chi Practice

By Xie Bing Can

Translated by Timothy Wang.

Edited by Barbara L. DeCoster, Ph.D.

The various styles of the Yang family's T'ai Chi Ch'uan (Taijiquan) are classified as da-ja, zhong-ja and xiao-ja (literally big frame, medium frame and small frame). Yang Chen-Fu's style is known as the da-ja, or the broad style. It contains martial arts techniques, and provides health benefits that include the curing of chronic disease.

Training in the Yang Cheng-Fu style is simple and easy. It progresses from relaxed to gentle. Gentleness breeds firmness so that the practitioner possesses both gentleness and steel-like firmness. The posture is precisely structured with the body centered and vertical.

The movements must be smooth and continuous, stable yet light and agile. To help master the "eight power strokes and five steps" (See T'AI CHI, Vol. 19, No. 2), so as to reveal its unique character and elegant image, certain psychological preparations must complement the physical movements.

Such mental discipline is expressed by six Chinese characters, which will be discussed in detail on the following pages. Briefly, they are:

The body must be relaxed—Song
while the mind stays calm—Jing
The movements must be slow—

Man

but with an even speed—Yun
Move lightly and—Qing

persevere in the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.—Heng

1. Song

Song is the premier characteristic of Tai Chi Chuan exercise. While the word means relaxed, the master will often criticize the student for not being relaxed. The Chinese character defies simple translation. Song requires all the joints, the muscles and organs in the body to be relaxed, as opposed to being tense, but not slack.

The late master Yang Cheng-Fu



Xie Bing Can in Snake Creeps Down.

stated: "During practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, all the skeletal joints must naturally relax. Moreover, breathing through the mouth and the abdomen must not be obstructed and the four limbs and the waist must not be forceful and tense.

"Internally, utilize intent or yi rather than force or li. That is, let ch'i (qi), or bio-energy, sink to the dantian while the spirit rises to the top of the head.

"Outwardly, the agility and lightness of the total being comes from closely coordinated movements of the feet, the legs, the waist, the sinking shoulders and the bent elbows. There is a saying that the flow through all the body joints is without interruption."

If the entire body can be relaxed when one practices T'ai Chi Ch'uan, then the cerebral skin and the central nerves will, under a gradual and relaxed condition, become well-regulated and rested.

This, in turn, vitalizes the internal organs, balances ch'i and blood circulation, opens all the passages of the bio-network, and achieves pronounced therapeutic results. The bio-network in Oriental medical theory, includes blood, lymphatic fluid, chi, electrical signal, and nerves.

To achieve song during T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice, one must first rouse

one's vital spirit by:

- Lifting up the head and rounding the groin,
- Releasing tension by "hollowing" the chest,
- Relaxing the abdomen with a slight bulge, and
- Sinking the ch'i into the dantian.

Next, "open" all the skeletal joints and relax all the muscles. Let the waist be straight and upright by lightly lining up the spinal column with the ming-men acupuncture point lightly tipped back and stretching the spine with its attached muscles vertically about the ji-zhong cavity (See figure, page 18). The unobstructed passage from hui-ying at the tailbone to bai-hui (at the top of the head) allows yi to ascend (from the heel of the front foot in a bow step).

The joints in both arms, from shoulder to elbow to wrist to palm to fingers, must all be relaxed and natural. The extension and bending, the opening and closing, of both arms must be free and coordinated.

Upon arrival at a posture, remember to let the waist sink, and the spirit rise, to relax the shoulders and elbow, to cock the wrist and to open the palm. In bow step, empty step, snake creeps down step, horse step, kick step and parting step, the joints in the groin and

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the knees must be loose and "open." By distinguishing the solid vs. empty leg, and making sure that the knee and calf are not heavily loaded, the steps become light and agile.

Song is an active rather than a passive state. It avoids being uptight and stiff. It has no use for brute force. It is important to avoid being so relaxed as to be lackadaisical and listless.

Achieving song leads one to a feeling of well-being which is very comforting.

2. Jing

A T'ai Chi Ch'uan classic has these sayings: "While the body is in motion, a quiet mind is most valued," and "The mind is constantly aware of the peaceful spirit that permeates the body." Jing means quiet, calm, and peaceful. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan, it refers to the state of mind.

Not only one's thoughts, but also one's expression and bearing must be peaceful and calm. Avoid distracting thoughts. To achieve such calmness, one must concentrate on T'ai Chi Ch'uan, particularly the movements and the postures.

Yang Cheng-Fu wrote, "While calmness wards off movement (normally, in T'ai Chi Ch'uan) one must remain calm despite movement." Therefore, in practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan, one must strive for calmness while in motion, i.e., externally in motion while internally at peace. The external motions are directed by the mind within. The movements start from the waist and abdomen, leading to the four limbs.

The movements must be measured and coordinated between all parts of the body, gradual yet continuous without break, arriving at each posture smoothly while yi/ch'i reaches the tip of all fingers and toes, filling the body with spirit (shen) and energy (ch'i). The movements will appear natural and peaceful. If one can achieve the above during practice, then in time one will enter a level others can only marvel at.

The above suggests that jing in T'ai Chi Ch'uan encompasses not only the mind, but also the body/form and the spirit/expression. A calm and peaceful mind, where random and distracting thoughts are purged, comes with the quiet stability of the form and gentleness of the spirit. Such a state leads to

the balance of yin and yang ch'i which in turn nourishes the blood and bio-energy. In ancient times, jing was thought to generate ch'i.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan classics also stated that "movements are like the rivers while calmness is like the mountains." To achieve jing or a calm mind is, however, extremely difficult. During practice, concentrate on agility and deftness of movements.

Apply intent, yi, rather than force. Over time, ch'i will circulate freely throughout the body and one will feel energetic and full of spirit and bio-energy, thus attaining the goal of improving one's health through T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice.

For beginning students of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the following should be stressed:

- Remember the names of each posture
- Learn the moves to arrive at each posture
- Pay attention to the path and direction of the movements
- Note the rules governing the movements of the hands, the eyes, the feet, etc.

Through daily practice, the movements and postures will become more familiar. With practice, the movements become mechanical and automatic. Gradually the mind will calm down. On the other hand, if jing cannot be attained in all three aspects, i.e., the mind, the body/form, and the spirit/expression, then the ultimate goal of T'ai Chi Ch'uan can never be achieved. One may be gratified by the mechanical movements in the practice, but it is only a "fluid" form of T'ai Chi Ch'uan that one has mastered.

Jing is not easily attained. It requires months of practice, in the mornings and in the evenings, paying attention to the correct postures and adhering to the rules of the various movements. Only then can one appreciate the saying of T'ai Chi Ch'uan classics, "Kung-fu comes from the method of practice and endless self



Xie Bing Can in Yang style Ward Off.

study." Literally, Kung-fu means energy-time. Practicing martial arts requires a great deal of time and energy. Therefore, Chinese martial arts are commonly called kung-fu.

My experience and the ancient teachings led me to the following formula for success:

*** Kung-Fu = Proper Method Of Practice + Time Spent Practicing**

3. Man

Man means slow. The slow movement of the body and limbs is characteristic of T'ai Chi Ch'uan exercises. The late master Yang Cheng-fu said that, "In practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the slower the better. The slowness increases the depth and length of breathing so that ch'i may sink down to the dantian and avoid the swelling of blood vessels (caused by tension)."

T'ai Chi Ch'uan movements are directed by yi, or intent. Thus the calmness of the mind leads to a slow or unhurried exercise. T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice goes from the interior to the exterior, meaning that yi, or intent, steers the movement of ch'i, while the

physical movements are directed by yi and ch'i. To a certain extent, slowness is necessitated by the external requirements to coordinate the movements of various parts of the body, and to ensure proper movements and postures.

Internally, slowness ensures unhurried breathing and the use of the mind and intent. In the slowness, the practitioner will appreciate the roundness, smoothness and continuous nature of the exercise, and pay attention to the order of the moves, the posture arrived at and the uninterrupted linkage through all the joints.

As one becomes more familiar with the moves and works to raise the level of skill, the exercise will further slow down. When one reaches the level where the more practice the slower the movements, then the movements will be driven by the consciousness generated by the mind, and ch'i will flow from dantian to the mingmen (rear dantian) from which it branches upward and downward.

The upward branch flows along the spine to ji-zhong to da-zhui (at the base of the neck. See figure, this page.) where it branches left and right toward each palm. At the same time, ch'i in the heart/chest area settles in the dantian, while above the da-zhui, ch'i flows from the reng-mai meridian to the tu-mai meridian. The downward branch of ch'i flowing from the mingmen passes the buttocks, the crotch, the knees, straight to the bottom of the feet.

During the T'ai Chi Ch'uan exercise, the waist is pivotal. Therefore, it must remain lively and relaxed. Attention must also be paid to tucking in the tail bone, rounding the groin, bringing the knees together (intent only); etc. The hands set the direction while the feet follow the body. While the entire body must move in the direction of the limbs, the two hands and the two feet are distinguished by the order of their movements, i.e., primary vs. secondary.

When one arrives at a posture, the chest, or shan-zhong, cavity should face forward. At this level of T'ai Chi Ch'uan accomplishment, the entire body and limbs will develop resilience akin to a snake under attack. "The tail

In the slowness, the practitioner will appreciate the roundness, smoothness and continuous nature of the exercise, and pay attention to the order of the moves, the posture arrived at and the uninterrupted linkage through all the joints.

moves when the head comes under attack, spirit roused. The head moves when the tail comes under attack, internal passages open. Both the head and tail move when the middle comes under attack. Up, down and in all four directions, defense is as ready as an arched bow."

Thus from the level of, "The more practice the slower the movement," one may achieve "extreme slowness." Note that the slow movements must not be interrupted, i.e., there must not be any pause. The moves developed from "extreme slowness" are of ultimate mobility. Thus the speed developed from the extremely slow movements approaches the greatest speed.

At the same time, one aims to develop softness in the movements which comes from practicing slow movements. Therefore, one must resort

to consciousness, or intent, rather than force. To avoid applying brute force means not using the strength one possesses. Thus one requires the mind to move the ch'i throughout the body up to the tips of the limbs so that yi accompanies ch'i at all times. If one can practice at such a high level, then one can achieve the extreme speed that comes from practicing very slow movements.

In other words, this goal cannot be reached without studying and practicing push hands, da-lu and paired san-so (2-person free hand fighting exercise). Only then can one appreciate the three elements of T'ai Chi Ch'uan: essence, ch'i, and spirit.

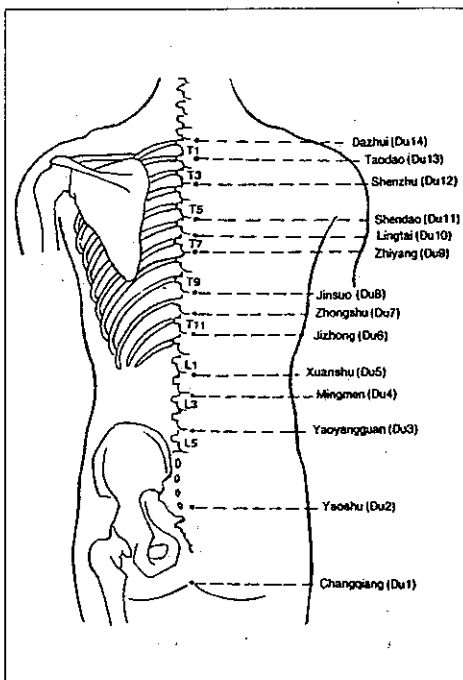
Anxiety must be avoided during the slow movements. The moves are seemingly calm and not rushed. For each practice session, the number of times the full set of T'ai Chi Ch'uan is repeated and the standards demanded by the practitioner are gradually increased and raised. The degree of appreciation and enlightenment depends on the quality and quantity of the practice.

The realization of T'ai Chi Ch'uan benefits is based on a combination of psychology, physiology, and physics. T'ai Chi Ch'uan is an exercise, both physical and mental, that improves vital spirit and cultivates ch'i. Experience has shown that T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice can improve health, prolong life, instill a sense of calmness and even cure illnesses.

Over the long run, these exercises develop a vigorous strength known as nei-ying (internal power) or hun-ying (wholesome power). This is the fundamental power of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Further training will impart resilience to such power, rather like the reed in the marshes, flexible in bending yet resilient and hard to break, thus reaching the highest level of T'ai Chi Ch'uan kung-fu. This is the beginning of a wonderfully profound and ingenious accomplishment.

For beginners, the slower the better, provided the basics are correctly executed and familiarized.

First, one must pay attention to applying the key tenets to the movements. Only then can one slow down the movements and raise the standard governing the precise posture.



Qing means lightly, i.e., without using force. It is the opposite of awkward force. It implies the use of yi (mind) instead of force, yet it must not result in floating or being uprooted.

Second, one must concentrate on figuring out and then mastering the finer points of the movements in coordination with the shifting between the empty and the solid.

Third, the tenets that guide the preparation and beginning postures must permeate the rest of the exercise. To achieve the best results, one must take practicing seriously and keep the movements natural.

It should take from 15 to 18 minutes to complete one set of the long form Yang style T'ai Chi Ch'uan. After studying for two to three years and having learned and become thoroughly familiar with all the moves and requirements, one can slow down to eventually taking 23 to 25 minutes to complete the set.

Of course, there must not be breaks or uneven speed. Only then can one begin to practice fast T'ai Chi Ch'uan. It has been said that the Yang and the Wu styles were originally fast T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

Both masters Yang Cheng-fu and Wu Jian-quan practiced fast T'ai Chi Ch'uan during their middle age. Before practicing fast T'ai Chi Ch'uan one must first master slow T'ai Chi Ch'uan to avoid irregularities or disorder that creeps in with speed.

4. Yun

Yun means even, which refers to the movements in T'ai Chi Ch'uan. A typical movement consists of four parts. (The author's method of teaching involves breaking each movement down into 4 parts.)

The motion of the limbs and the body throughout the four parts must be coordinated with breathing and carried out at an even speed without interruption or pause.

From the beginning to the end of the exercise, the movements are gradual and gentle. The breathing is soft

and continuous, reflecting the unique features of song, jing, man and yun.

During T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice, each posture must transition smoothly into the next, while maintaining a constant tempo. Step lightly as a cat, both arms and both legs moving inward or outward continuously at a constant speed, tracing circular arcs.

Yun is not passive nor absolute. It aims to demonstrate the continuous and rhythmic nature of the T'ai Chi Ch'uan form. It orchestrates the close meshing of breathing with movements so that each breath naturally deepens and lengthens, becoming refined and even. The chest feels comfortable and the stomach relaxed. Indeed, the entire body feels harmonious, happy and at ease.

5. Qing

Qing means lightly, i.e., without using force. It is the opposite of awkward force. It implies the use of yi (mind) instead of force, yet it must not result in floating or being uprooted.

As in the classics, "Once in motion every part of the body is light and agile and must be threaded together . . . (first) extremely soft, then extremely hard," which means one has the strength but does not use it.

Moreover, one must avoid using force from a part of the body which could lead to the fault of "double weight," that is, weight on both legs as opposed to distinguishing between the empty and the substantial leg. "Relaxed but not loose," and "seems to open but not quite" are all manifestations of Tai Chi Jing.

(Jing is the power in Chinese martial art that is derived from muscles energized by ch'i (bio-energy) to their maximum potential. It is an explosive surge of energy focused on a small striking point for a fraction of a second. Jing can be produced only after a great deal of training.)

To understand and harness such power, to internalize and refine it so that it can be used at will, requires long periods of diligent practice. Such power is also known as "light and agile jing." The appreciation of jing comes only after practicing push hands during which one develops agility through lightness, and a sensitivity to action and response.

By working on lightness, the move-

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ments become lively and agile, and the sensitivity (response to attack) is heightened. Therefore, only by adding qing to the four characters discussed earlier, song, jing, man, and yun, can one achieve the description found in the T'ai Chi Ch'uan classics:

"Empty and solid stepping with light and agile circular movements, upper and lower body following each other with the waist serving as an axle,

lively and smooth as if the silk is lightly unwound from the cocoon, every movement is rounded yet natural."

Once one reaches the level of

Xie Bing Can, a native of Zhejiang Province, China, has studied T'ai Chi Ch'uan for over 45 years. His teachers included Fu Zhongwen and Ma Yue-liang. He was T'ai Chi Coach at East China Normal University in Shanghai, and has taught throughout China.

"light, agile, lively, smooth and circular," one becomes calm and stable yet light, agile and flexible as described in the T'ai Chi Ch'uan classics:

"Body centered, stable as a bell, empty and solid stepping with light and agile circular movements, left side solid then left side agile right side solid then right side light Sinking to one side yet lively, double heavy is a flaw while double light creates liveliness and agility."

(In the third line regarding left side solid and left side agile, the apparent contradiction is explained by the author: solid refers to the leg and light and agile refers to the arms.)

A beginner must distinguish between the empty and the solid, or substantial, leg. He must move lightly and agilely, and step lightly with the accurate placement of the foot. By practicing "moving step push hands" and "da lu," one can attain light and agile kung-fu (skill).

Through diligent practice of "ward off, roll back, press and push," one can develop some basic push hands skills, such as: "adhere, connect, stick, and follow." At the same time, one can also

learn the four related jing (powers) associated with "listen, neutralize, seek and grab."

Furthermore, one must learn to abandon oneself to follow the opponent yet not lose the initiative. According to the classics: "I do not move if the opponent does not move. I move at the slightest sense of movement so that my intent, or yi, precedes that of my opponent." Such kung-fu provides endless pleasure indeed.

6. Heng

Heng means to persevere. It is vital to practice T'ai Chi Ch'uan daily at a set time, for a set amount of time. Avoid the analogy of "The three days of fishing including two days to dry the net." Like the common sayings that "ten days of practice is wasted if one day is missed," and "every day's practice shows," so one must persevere with practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan and studying books about T'ai Chi Ch'uan to improve one's technique.

One must follow rules, accentuate quality first and then quantity. Quality refers to the demand on the postures and movements. Quantity, the number of repetitions, on the other hand, enhances quality, for without sufficient repetitions, the correct postures and movements cannot be attained.

Generally speaking, one should practice once in the morning and once in the evening, or once a day with many repetitions, or repeating each style many times. At the very least, one should practice once a day. If one practices one set only, it would only exercise and loosen the joints.

By doing two sets each time, one can maintain enhanced health (from early T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice) into old age. One may even increase one's energy level and delay the aging process. Only those who practice three sets or more each time may develop kung-fu. Both masters Yang and Chen practiced tens of repetitions daily.

Experience shows that the best results come from having two or three friends practice together. Of course, pointers from a good teacher are essential.

One should model after the ancient masters, seek out good teachers and friends, follow the ethics and persevere in the studies. The future is then unlimited.●

Huang Zhenhuan on: Theory and Practice of Taijiquan

By Wu Ziyu

Translated by Yang Chunli

Photos by Lucy Huang

The following is a dialogue on the Theory and Practice of Taijiquan and Dadao Taijiquan in an interview with Prof. Huang Zhenhuan, creator of Dadao Taijiquan

Wu Ziyu: Could you please tell us what influences your three master teachers (Tian Zhaolin, Wu Tunan and Shi Ming) had on you?

Huang Zhenhuan: You know, my health condition was not very good as a young boy and my father took me to Shanghai in 1947 to learn from Tian Zhaolin.

He was a disciple of Yang Cheng-fu and a master himself, particularly in Taiji push hands. I witnessed him throwing a reputable Taijiquan master meters away immediately when their hands touched.

More amazingly, Master Tian could easily throw the opponent away without even touching him. I was confused at that time and learned later that it was the so-called Lingkong Jin, empty force. My experience with Mr. Tian improved my health condition and ever since then Taijiquan has been a part of my life.

I've been a teacher in Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics since the 1960s. The Cultural Revolution gave me enough

spare time to study Taijiquan. On hearing that the great master Wu Tunan was teaching Taijiquan in Zizhuyuan Park (and later at the Beijing Astronautics Museum), I went to see him.

Mr. Wu, a learned Taijiquan master with advanced education, was humor-

Mr. Wu accepted me as his disciple. The greatest lesson I learned from him is that the ultimate goal of Taijiquan practice is healthy longevity, not just mastery of the techniques.

Around 1980, I learned from a master of Ruyi Taijiquan, Shi Ming. He mastered the core abilities of

"Xukong," empty force, movement from both Wang Yongquan, a famous Yang-style Taijiquan master and another master of Wu style Taijiquan.

Based on this, he developed his own branch, Ruyi Taijiquan. Shi attached great importance to zhuang gong (stance gongfu), insisting that eight months of standing zhuang (standing stance gongfu) is essential to every beginner before any further learning. There is something unique about his Jingzhuang gong (stillness stance gongfu), Dancao gong (One Posture Drill Gongfu), Ruyi Taijiquan application frame and push hands.

Wu: Do you have any suggestions for beginners?

Huang: First, pay attention to your body's position.

Three points, Baihui, Huiyin, and the middle point of the straight line connecting the two Yongquan cavities on left foot and on right foot, should be in the same vertical line.

(The Baihui is at the crown of the head and the Huiyin is at the bottom of the

torso.)

The center of gravity should be aligned with the body's centerline. But remember, this is achieved by active relaxation and the tucking of the umbilical zone and the slight rounding of the Mingmen, not just by adjusting your body deliberately to that position.

(Mingmen, literally, means the Life Door. It is an acupuncture cavity that belongs to the Governing Vessel



Huang Zhenhuan in Turn Body, Throw fist.

ous and accessible. Although over 80, he had a graceful presence and was quick-minded and agile. His great skills were beyond description. In push hands every part of his body could Fa (use explosive force) on the opponent without being noticed.

He could Fa his opponent meters away without hurting him. His Lingkong Jin, just like Tian Zhaolin's, was magic. At the end of the 1960s,

Wu Ziyu is a senior engineer, who studied with Wu Tunan in the early 1970s and Huang Zhenhuan from the mid-1990s. Yang Chunli is a college English teacher. Lucy Huang is the daughter of Huang Zhenhuan.

meridian.)

It's a tough and slow process, but long practice and perseverance will definitely bring you unexpected rewards.

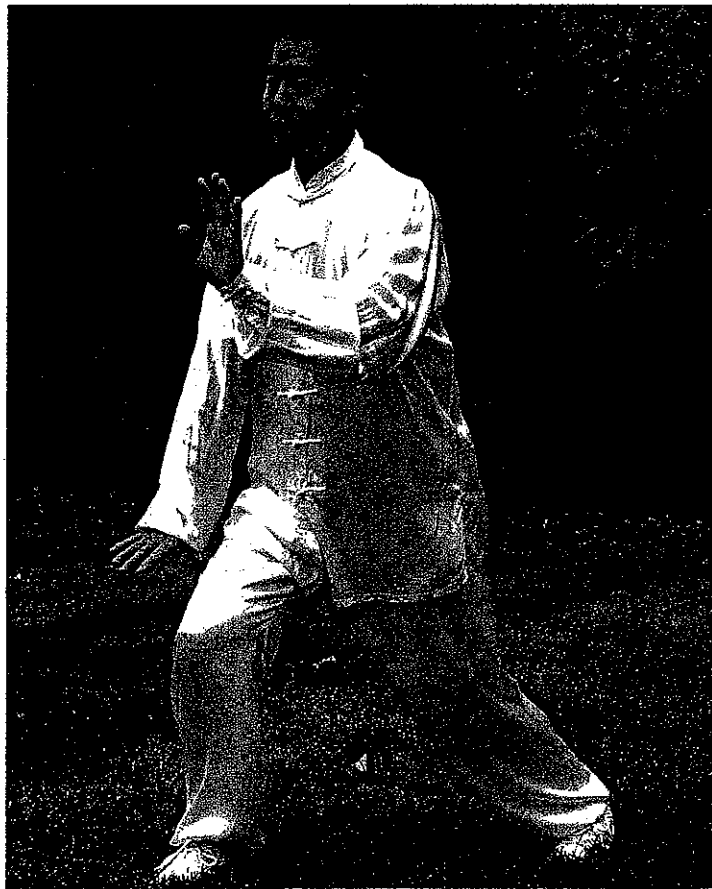
Second, try to avoid "dead Zhuang," which is most likely to occur when standing still and stiff in a state of "Wan Kong" (deadly stillness). You have to relax every part of the body, especially the shoulders, hips, elbows, knees, wrists, ankles, the spine, and the mind.

Third, pay special attention to relaxing the parts below your hips, especially the Yongquan.

Harmonize your Yongquan with the earth, Baihui (at the crown of the head) with the heaven, and the other parts of your body with the surroundings, but you cannot put too much thought on that. Now everything seems unreal. Forget it but don't lose it.

After a long time of Wuji Zhuang practice, your body gets loosened and your Yongquan can breathe and be Xu (insubstantial) or Shi (solid) freely.

The reflection of qi at the bottom of your feet happens naturally, and your whole body is clear and unblocked,



Brush Knee, Twist Step.

with an open route from Ren Mai to Du Mai (the meridians that go down the front of the head and torso and up the back).

Your body feels relaxed, soft, flexible, full, and empty, and gradually your gongfu gets enhanced. Little by little your old health troubles clear up. In

push hands, you can easily break the opponent's balance by floating him up. It is the so-called Wen Fa (Literally, this means Scholar fire).

Wu: What is Taiji Song gong?

Huang: Song gong (Relaxation Gongfu) is an exercise for active relaxation and qi cultivation. It helps the practitioner to acquire the skill of "quietness in movement and movement in quietness."

Taiji Song gong is such an exercise under the guidance of Taiji principle. The Chinese character Song means the state of relaxation, and in order to achieve such a state what you need first is quietness, which helps the body relax.

Active relaxation means relaxed body-movement through which the practitioner can acquire the gongfu of "Song Rou" (relaxation and flexibility) and "Song Tong" (relaxation and clearness)."

This acquisition helps unblock the Small Zhoutian (Small Circulation) and the Grand Zhoutian (Grand Circulation) and gain Neigong (Internal Dan Gongfu).

When Internal Dan (Elixir) is gained, Danyuan field comes into being, which is a high level of

Professor Huang Zhenhuan became a disciple of Tian Zhaolin, a Yang style master, in 1947 and it has become an indispensable part of his life ever since. From the 1960s, he studied with the famous master Wu Tunan, who studied Yang and Wu styles. Subsequently, he studied with Shi Ming, who founded Ruyi Taijiquan.

Huang feels that his experiences with the three masters helped him enormously in understanding the essence of Taijiquan and Taiji push hands.

Together with co-disciples of Wu Tunan, Huang founded the "Research Society of Wu Tunan's Martial Art Philosophy," in 1991 and was elected deputy managing director.

In four years after his retirement in 1994, he studied intensively the classic

works of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism on Yangsheng (health preservation) and Taiji theories.

Subsequently, he wrote an article, entitled "On Silk Reeling Gong of Taijiquan," and created 10 methods of Taijiquan Song gong practice. The 10 methods of Song gong practice were the basic foundation of the system he created called Dadao (Great Dao) Taijiquan gong.

From 1998 to 2002, based on the application frame of Wu Tunan's Taijiquan, Huang composed a new branch on the basis of Yang style and Wu style Taijiquan.

The new frame embodies the Daoist principle of Dan Dao Zhoutian (Elixir Cycle Heaven, which includes small circulation and grand circulation) and the

universal law of "creation—restoration" espoused by Dao De Jing and Yi Jing.

At a "Dadao (Great Dao) Taijiquan Seminar" held in Beijing in March, 2003, Huang delivered a lecture entitled, "Taijiquan Danyuan (Elixir of Life) Field, in which he explained the importance of cultivating the internal Dan (Elixir Field where Elixir or Qi is stored and generated in the human body) under the guidance of Taiji principles.

The Danyuan field thus formed can hardly be perceived by the opponent, as it is formless and invisible; therefore, it is free from the general defect of other Taijiquan branches in that the practitioner's Li (force) and Jin (strength) are easily perceived.—Wu Ziyu

Taijiquan practice.

Song gong is the foundation of Taijiquan. Song and Jing (Relaxation and Calmness) is the soul of Taijiquan.

Wu: Song has a very rich meaning in Dadao Taijiquan, doesn't it? What does it mean anyway?

Huang: Song means Kuan Song (good surroundings), Shu Song (relaxation of the mind), Qing Song (relaxation of the spirit), Peng Song (relaxation of the body), Ling Song (relaxation of the joints) and Kong Song (relaxation of the whole). These are the so-called "six Song of body and soul."

The sequence of relaxing is first the mind (intent), then the spirit, then qi, and last the body. Relaxation of the mind means to be free of thoughts and awareness. The absence of intention brings peace to the heart. Relaxing the spirit means releasing tension to quiet the body.

Relaxation of qi includes that of Wai Qi (breathing) and Nei Qi (internal energy), and it harmonizes the body.

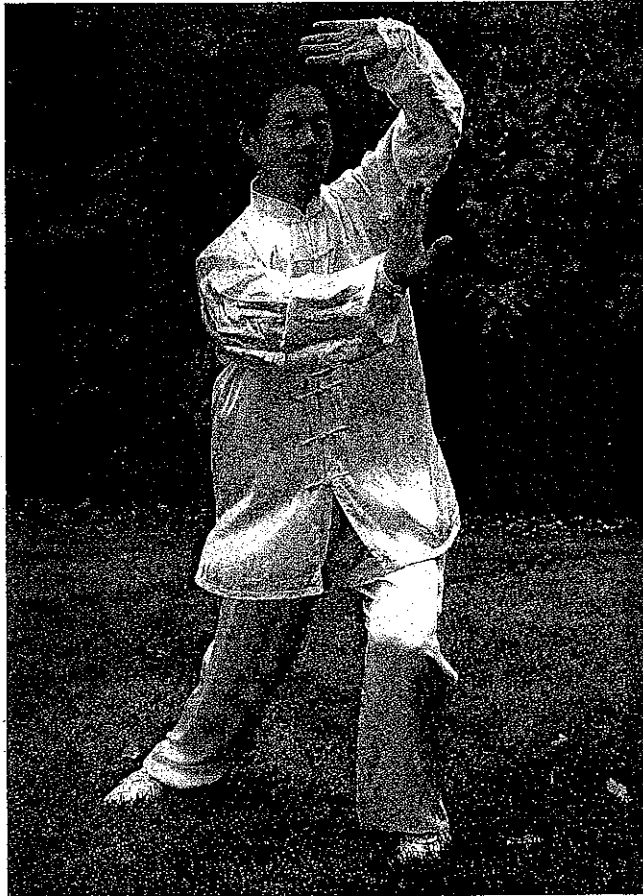
Relaxation of the body smoothes the flow of qi and it includes that of the external parts (bones, muscles, skin), the internal parts (internal organs), as well as the nine major joints (like transport of qi as though through a pearl with nine curved holes).

When this occurs, they are loosened but well-connected and make the body a highly sensitive and delicate organism.

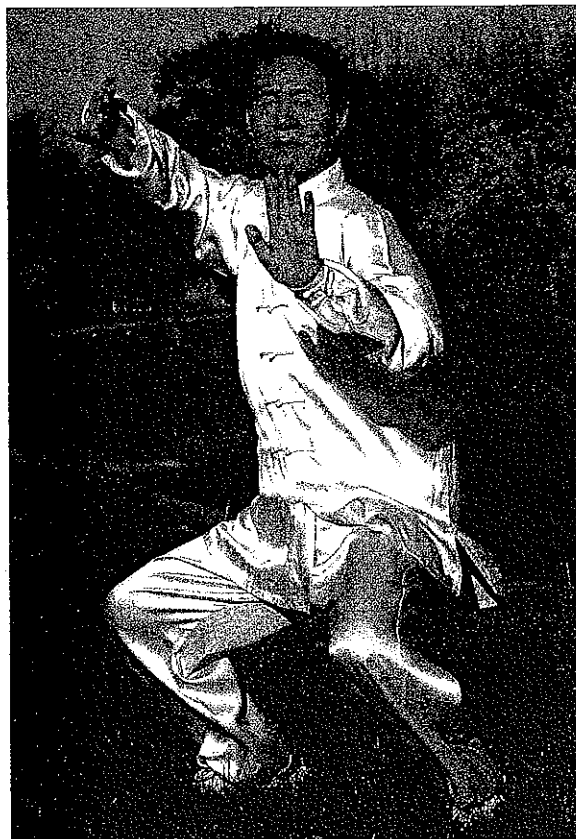
Pay special attention to the relaxation of the head, neck, eyebrows, chest, back (the spine), Huiyin and Weilu (the tailbone, which in acupuncture is called Changqiang).

The word Song implies quietness, extension, softness, flexibility, sinking, fullness, emptiness, being free of obstruction, sensitivity and nothingness.

According to the principle of "the only motion is returning" in Tao Te Ching, Song gong practitioners need ultimate relaxation



Fair Lady Works at Shuttle.



Fan Through the Back.

and quietness and practice of the "Five Grand." This "Five Grand" is absolutely necessary. To avoid slacking, slumping and shrinking, the practitioner needs Shen Xuling (the spirit soaring as if hung up at Baihui by an invisible force).

Wu: What is Song gong practice intended to get rid of in the human body?

Huang: Song gong practice aims to help the practitioner get into the state of relaxation, flexibility, softness, quietness, stability, agility, sensibility, swiftness, full, clearance and nothingness by getting rid of the stiffness, hardness, tension, dullness, turbidity, clumsiness, awkwardness, obstruction, etc.

Wu: What is the goal of Song gong practice?

Huang: The goal of Song gong practice is to preserve, accumulate, store, cultivate and utilize qi and to cultivate Zhen Qi (real Qi), Yuan Qi (original qi, which refers to the original essence which a person inherited from his parents) and Zhong Qi (center qi), and then to achieve "Qing Ling (lightness and sensibility), Tong Kong (clearness and emptiness), Yuan Rong (smoothness and harmony), Xu Ling (soaring spirit)."

Through this practice, just as Mr. Wu Tunan described, "every tiny part of the body is lively, tensile, calm and clear." Based on this, the practitioner can carry on the cultivation of his Ti (body), Qi (energy) and Shen (spirit).

Song gong practice gives the practitioner a sensible and clear mind, a light spirit, a peaceful heart and a sound body. Through preserving the spirit and energy the flow of qi gets smooth, the blood circulation unblocked, the internal organs function well, the bones and muscles become relaxed and flexible.

As a result, the practitioner is free of diseases, his health maintained and life prolonged. At the same time, his strengthened Nei Qi (internal energy) helps create the Danyuan field, which is essential to

the advanced gongfu of Taijiquan.

Wu: What are the methods of Song gong practice?

Huang: We have "the Ten Methods of Taiji Song gong practice," "the Eight Methods of Swinging gong," and "the Five Methods of Song Cao gong (Relaxing One Posture Drill Gongfu)."

Wu: What are the Ten Methods of Taiji Song gong practice?

Huang: They are as follows:

1) Song (relax) Jian (shoulders) Song Wan (wrists) gong—relaxing shoulders and wrists, qi starting from Yongquan and flowing along the back;

2) Jian (shoulders) Quan (circle) gong—moving shoulders in circles (Vertical, horizontal), dispersing qi;

3) Ti Ju (raise) Qing (raise) Zhi (finger) gong—raising one finger of each hand, nursing the spleen and stomach; raising two fingers of each hand, nursing the three Jiao;

4) Yao (waist) Quan (circle) gong—waist and spine surging (vertically and horizontally) like a pupa, Du Mai opened and qi dispersed;

5) Ying Yang Kua (hips) Quan (circle) gong—hips circling leading motions of knees and ankles;

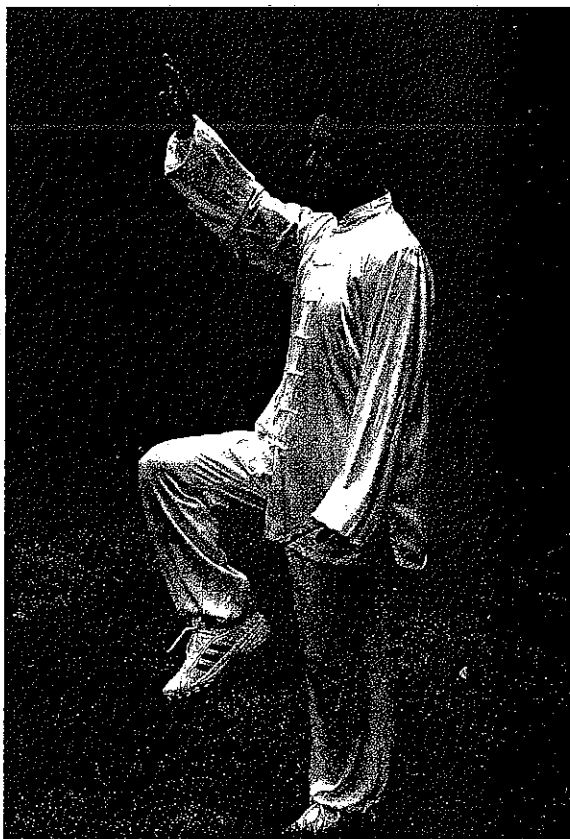
6) Song (relax) Xi (knees) Sheng (up) Jiang (down) gong—bending legs, massaging knees and lifting and bending the body to smooth the flow of Nei Qi (internal energy);

7) Wan Yao (bend) Bu (nourish) Shen (kidneys) gong—fingers and toes connected and the kidney nourished;

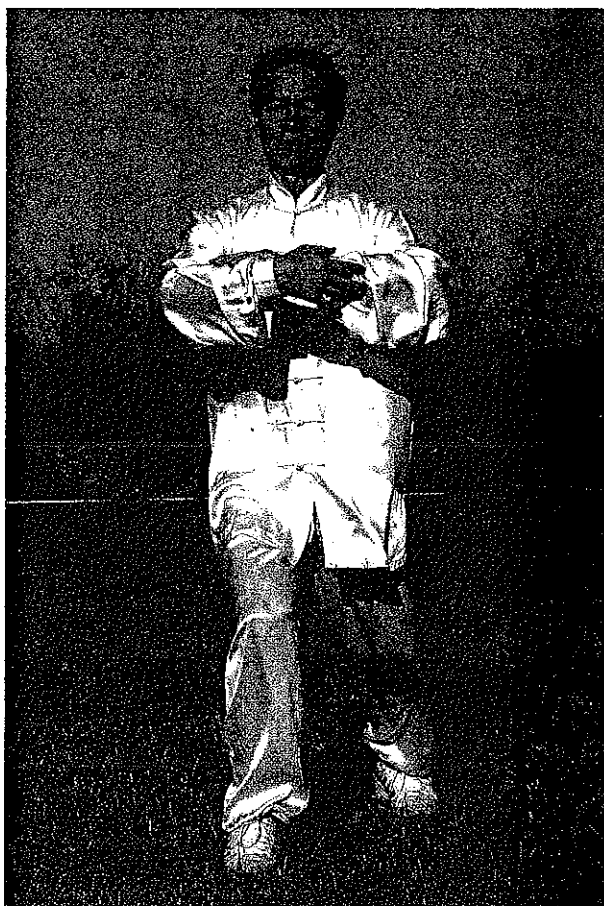
8) Dun Xia (squat) Kai (open) Qiao (acupoints) gong—squatting and circling the body to open the acupoints;

9) Dantian (Field of Elixir) Nei (internal) Zhuan (circling) gong—Dantian moving in circles with hands on the navel;

10) Zhua (clutch) Bi (close) Wo (clutch) Gu (stabilize) gong—alternatively clutching and loosening hands to accumulate Jing and Qi (essence and energy).



Golden Cock Stands on One Leg.



Grasp the Peacock's Tail, Jostle.

* The above is just a very simple introduction of the methods of Taiji Song gong practice. A more detailed account is to be included in another article.

Wu: Could you please tell us some key points of Song gong practice?

Huang: OK. There are ten points:

Firstly, feet parallel or at a small angle;

Secondly, straight body posture;

Thirdly, the three points [Baihui, Huiyin, and the middle point of the straight line connecting the two Yongquan cavities (on left foot and on right foot)] in the same vertical line;

Fourthly, spirit soaring;

Fifthly, qi sinking to Yongquan;

Sixthly, "Five Grand" of the body;

Seventhly, "Five Nothingness" of the body and these "Five Nothingness are Wu Xing (no shape), Wu Xiang (no image), Wu Gen (no root of force), Wu Yuan (no source of force), Wu Dian (no sluggish point);

Eighthly, Shen (spirit) leads action, Qi (energy) leads movement, waist (the axis) leads form;

Ninthly, the inter-transformation of You (exist or have) and Wu (non-exist or nothingness), Dong (motion) and Jing (stillness), Tun [gulp the opponent down to the practitioner's stomach (spiritually)] and Tu [throw out the opponent from the practitioner's stomach (spiritually)], Xu (insubstantiality) and Shi (solidity);

Tenthly, Nei Qi goes from Ren Mai (Conception Vessel, one of the eight qi vessels on human body) to Yongquan, from Yongquan to Du Mai (Governing Vessel, one of the eight qi vessels on human body), opening Xiao Zhoutian (Small Circulation) and Da Zhoutian (Grand Circulation).

Wu: Why do you call what you are practicing and teaching Dadao Taijiquan?

Huang: The Taijiquan forefather, Zhang Sanfeng, had told practitioners, "I hope people preserve good health and a long life

but do not need to pursue the skills and techniques, which are not the core and essence of Taijiquan."

It is commonly agreed by generations of Taijiquan masters that the purpose of practicing Taijiquan is to preserve good health and a long life.

As for its art of attack and defense, it's only the by-product, as had been repeatedly emphasized by Master Wu Tunan who, having lived to 105 years of age, is an example of Taijiquan benefits.

Inspired by the forefathers of Taijiquan, and based on the principles of Taiji and Dadao, together with my own practice and teaching experience, I composed Dadao Taijiquan, which incorporates the advantages of different styles.

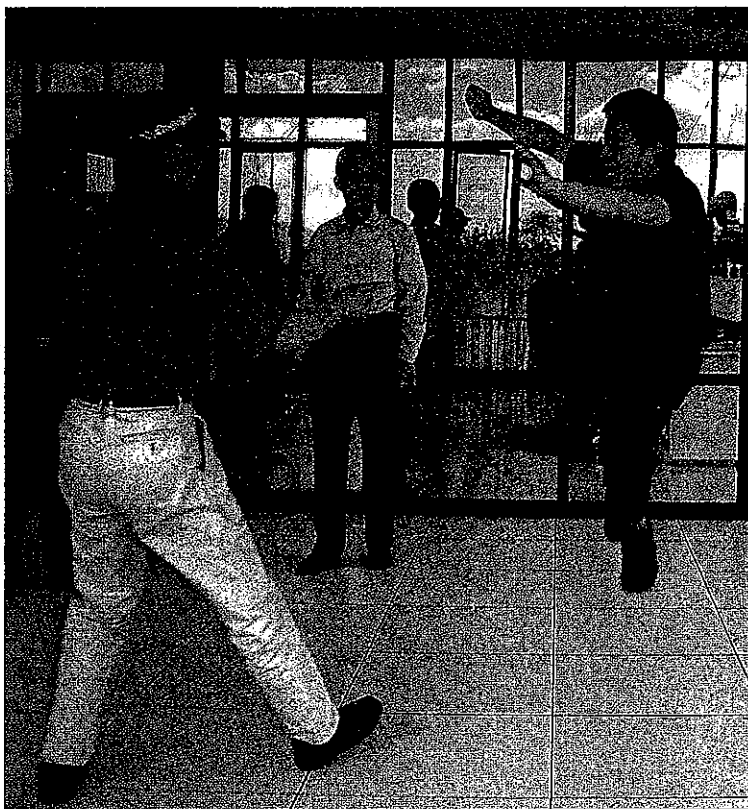
Wu: How are we to understand Taiji?

Huang: Taiji is a great treasure of traditional Chinese culture. It is the beginning of stillness and the end of motion, or the beginning of motion and the end of stillness.

Taiji is the instant moment of the transition of stillness and motion. It is neither stillness nor motion, neither the ultimate stillness nor the ultimate motion. It is the unification of yin and yang, of stillness and motion.

As Taiji returns to nothingness, it becomes Wuji, which as its name suggests, is the extremity of nothingness. Wu means nothing to say, to form, and to target. Ji means extremity. Dadao is formless and invisible. It is void and nothingness, from which Taiji is born.

The Dadao Taijiquan is manifested as "one movement, one steady-



Huang pushes a student.

ness," or "one form, one steadiness." This means that in Taijiquan practice, after every movement or every form, there is a pause that follows (This pause lasts about three to six breaths).

This refers to each movement being a motion and after each motion there is a steadiness that follows,

which is manifested as a stationary posture. A move is a motion; a stationary posture is a state of stillness, which is motionless.

In the case of "one form, one steadiness," one form may consist of a moving posture and a stationary posture. The moving posture may consist of one or more than one movement, which is also followed by a stillness posture.

The motion is Yang; the stillness is Yin (Yin and Yang are two polarities). When there is one Yin and one Yang, the Yin and Yang balance is reached. The practitioner has reached the state of steadiness.

From this point, the state of Taiji is reached. When the practitioner has reached the Taiji state, his/her mind becomes peaceful; his/her qi becomes harmonious. Then the practitioner feels carefree, no worries, no disturbances, and nothing exists and then feels nothingness and emptiness.

Thus, the state of Wuji is reached. Now the practitioner has returned to Wuji state. This is also called the cultivation of restoration or reversing cultivation.

There are three key points that are worth emphasizing. These are returning to insubstantiality, returning to emptiness, and returning to nothingness. They have very similar meanings but also subtle differences.

Different practitioners need different time durations to reach the state of steadiness.

Wu: What is Dao?

Huang: According to Tao Te Ching; Chapter 25 and the book, "Song of Taijiquan's Real Meaning," "Dao" is "No shape, no image," so during cultivation it's invisible, inaudible, but comprehensible and provable.



Push Down

During cultivation, anything visible, audible and tangible is, therefore, not Dao.

Dao is "the law of nature," "the principle of everything," and "the origin of all." Jin (strength), Zhao (tricks), Shu (techniques), Xing (shape) are but a preliminary level of Taijiquan practice.

It is the nature of Dao to cultivate oneself back to one's original state, that is, to "Huan Xu (return to insubstantiality), Fan Kong (return to emptiness), Gui Wu (return to nothingness)."

It also agrees with the Reversing Skill. This means reversing the cultivation process. The practitioner returns to Taiji state from Yin and Yang balancing state, then from Taiji state returns to Wuji state of Taoism and the Dao of Divinity, and is the only way to reach Dao.

Wu: Then what is Dadao?

Huang: Dadao is the great Dao of longevity and advanced gongfu. Dadao leads to the bright, the limitless and eternity and the cultivation of Dadao is that of Xing (human nature) and Ming (physical vitality).

Zhang Sanfeng pointed out in his "Dao Yan Qian Jin Shuo:" "The primary concern of Dadao is the cultivation of Xin (mind) and Xing (human nature)."

It is believed that Taijiquan practitioners should not focus on muscle exercises or physical resistance, but on the cultivation of Xin and Xing by active relaxation.

Through progressive practice, the transformation of Shen (spirit) and qi is achieved, the internal Dan is cultivated, a sound body and a long life are gained and the internal energy is accumulated.

As Master Wu Tunan said, "Taijiquan researchers believe that the fighting techniques are by no means our primary



Single Whip



Step Backward onto Tiger.

concern. Dadao is what Taijiquan intends for." Why? It's simply that however skillful you are in fighting; once you die everything is gone.

To sum up, Dao is Dadao and Dadao is Dao.

Wu: What about Dadao Taijiquan and its cultivation?

Huang: Dadao Taijiquan is not a newly created style, but the advanced gongfu of Taijiquan, the essential path to every style. It aims at the cultivation of Dao and the fighting techniques under the guidance of the theory of Taiji.

Dadao is for longevity while the practice of forms is for body strengthening and defense. The former is the foundation, while the latter is the application and a by-product. Dao contains techniques and techniques come from Dao.

Just moving the body is not the right way to practice Taijiquan because it would lead to double results (intent and action happening at the same time). On the contrary, every movement initiated by Shen and qi should contribute to the practitioner's self-cultivation.

In such practice, "Shen leads the action, qi leads the movement, and waist (axis) leads the shape." Only practice of this kind can be called cultivation, in which no inappropriate movement in the form or images in the mind are involved, the movement is led by Shen and initiated by Nei Qi (inner energy), the disturbed body returns to stillness, then to nothingness.

In this way, Taijiquan "exercise" is elevated to Taijiquan "cultivation" and the practice of "Xing (shape)" and "Shu (techniques)" is elevated to "Xiu Dao (the cultivation of Dao)."

It is achieved through active relaxation and stillness, cultivation of the mind and spirit, the inter-transformation of Shen and Qi, of You (exist or have) and Wu (non-exis-

tence or nothingness), of Dong (movement) and Jing (stillness).

The cultivation of Dadao and Taiji is the combination of Yang (preservation) and Lian (practice), of Ti (human body) and Yong (application). Therefore, Dadao Taijiquan can be defined as the cultivation of Dadao, not just the exercise of "Xing" (shape) and "Shu" (techniques).

Wu: How did the idea of Dadao Taijiquan occur to you?

Huang: In the long process of research and practice, I noticed a phenomenon that is worth pondering. Some Taijiquan masters with very good gongfu died at an early age, which is a real pity.

Some made great efforts and achievements when they were young but were tormented with illnesses when getting old. Others are great both in gongfu and in health. What causes the difference may be as follows:

Firstly, what they value is different. Some practitioners laying particular stress on fighting techniques have a lot of practice but

pay little attention to health preservation and as a result will over-consume their energy. Long years of such practice will inevitably lead to declining health, even premature death.

Some people put more emphasis on health preservation and make a good balance of preservation and cultivation. Practice based on health preservation helps form a virtuous cycle and the practitioner can therefore obtain a long life and good gongfu.

Secondly, their moral level is different. In push hands, some people aim at winning over the opponent and their aggressiveness is likely to harm their health.

On the other hand, some others never exert themselves unduly either in practice or in push hands. They don't intend to harm or give much thought to the result. Their tolerance and generosity bring them health.

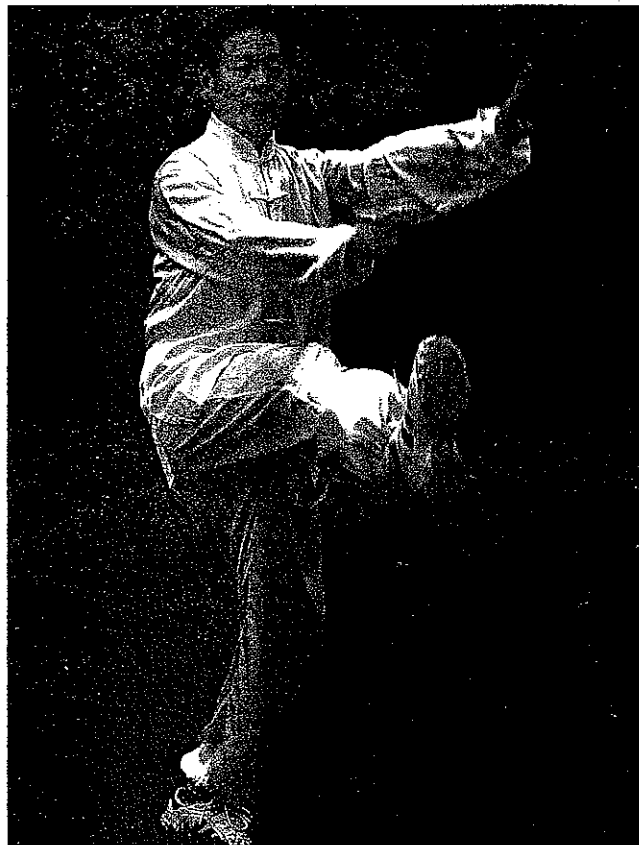
Thirdly, they are at different levels of Dao cultivation. Taiji is Dadao and is for health preservation and longevity, while the tech-



Strike the Tiger.



White Crane Flashes Its Wings.



Kick with Toes.

niques are trivial and of secondary importance.

Taijiquan practice includes the cultivation of Dadao and the exercise of techniques. Some people practice Taijiquan for Dao cultivation and health preservation while some do it for techniques and skills. The results are different.

Wu: Is there any difference in essence between the practice of Dadao Taijiquan and that of a general kind?

Huang: Yes, there is.

Firstly, Dadao Taijiquan emphasizes the perception and understanding of Dao, and aims at health preservation and longevity.

Only under the guidance of Tao Te Ching and Yi Jing can the cultivation be efficient and fruitful. Tao Te Ching requires intensive reading. It's pretty hard to start with but beneficial if you persist.

The average Taijiquan practitioner focuses on the forms and techniques. Though their health condition and gongfu can both get enhanced through exercise, few of them can perceive Dao or ways to preserve a healthy and long life.

Secondly, Dadao Taijiquan practice starts with the fundamental gong—Wuji zhuang (Wuji Stance Gongfu) and Song gong (Relaxation Gongfu), followed by Taijiquan forms and push hands. They can also be performed at the same time.

But it is hard for the average practitioner to get a wise teacher or the right access with such strict training.

Thirdly, Dadao Taijiquan requires Song gong practice, and each body movement is initiated by Shen and qi. It is characterized as "Shen leads the action, qi leads the movement, and the waist (axis) leads the shape."

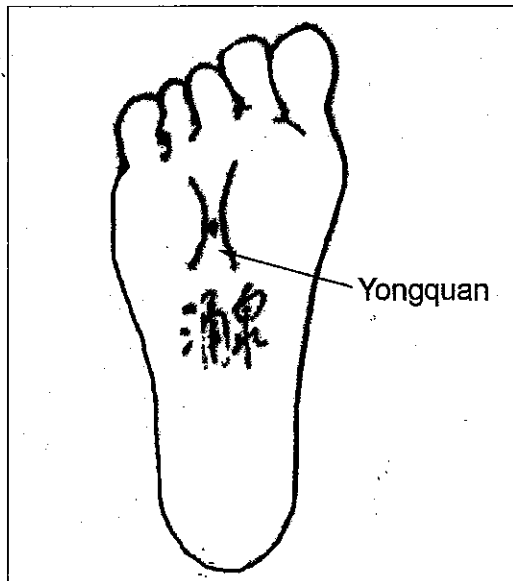
The average practitioner is reluctant to give up their awkward and stiff force. As a result, their Nei Qi (inner energy) is blocked and their bodies and limbs are stiff. This results in the forms being performed mechanically.

Fourthly, in push hands, Dadao Taijiquan calls for health preservation



Grasp the Peacock's Tail. Make a Circle.

and the practitioner can "na," capture, the opponent with the help of Nei Qi which initiates body movement. In this way, the practitioner is able to tell whether his practice is proper and whether his, as well as the opponent's, energy channels are open.



Yongquan, Gushing Spring.

The average practitioner who gives much thought to the result and in push hands will Na and Fa, expel, the opponent not with Nei Qi but with the form. They usually resist each other with inappropriate force and undue exertion. Over time, such practice will inevitably lead to over-exertion and declined health.

Fifthly, Dadao Taijiquan calls for the sinking of qi to the Yongquan cavity (See drawing below), which is naturally reflected to the Upper Dantian (This is also called Niwan cavity, an acupuncture point.) and thus circulates around the Zhoutian. (This refers to Small Zhoutian or Grand Circulation. Sometimes it refers to both.) (See drawing page 24.)

The average Taijiquan practice calls for sinking qi to the Middle Dantian (the abdominal area) and, in fact, some people may not even be able to accomplish this. Zhoutian gong practice is therefore neglected.

Sixthly, Dadao Taijiquan emphasizes the cultivation of human spirit and temperament, which is mental and spiritual, thus it requires that the practitioner returns to the Wuji state, in which he/she feels there is "no shape, no image, the entire body being transparent and empty."

On the contrary, the average practitioner remains at a preliminary level. They are only required to be skilled at shape formations and techniques with smooth movements, natural breathing and progressively flexible, nimble and free performances.

Years of such practice will obviously bring health benefits and some increase in gongfu. A good number of Taijiquan practitioners say that they do it to exercise their bones and muscles and to limber their limbs.

Practice of this kind is for physical strengthening and remains at the shape formation level; thus, their push hands practice is a physical confrontation.

Many people make great efforts in the practice of forces, techniques and skills, which is good but still at the physical level. It has not reached the Dadao Taijiquan level yet.

Seventhly, Nei Dan gong (Internal Dan Gongfu) is essential in Dadao

Taijiquan. The Danyuan energy thus accumulated forms a Danyuan field, Tun (Literally it means gulp)* and Tu (Literally it means getting something out of the body)* which can be applied in push hands.

The average practitioner just focuses on physical exercises and techniques, and doesn't understand the functions of Nei Dan (Internal Dan).

*Tun and Tu here means energy exchanges (while Hu and Xi (breathing) simply means air exchanges) between the practitioner and the universe, Tun is from the universe to the human body and Tu the opposite.

Wu: What does "creation—restoration" mean?

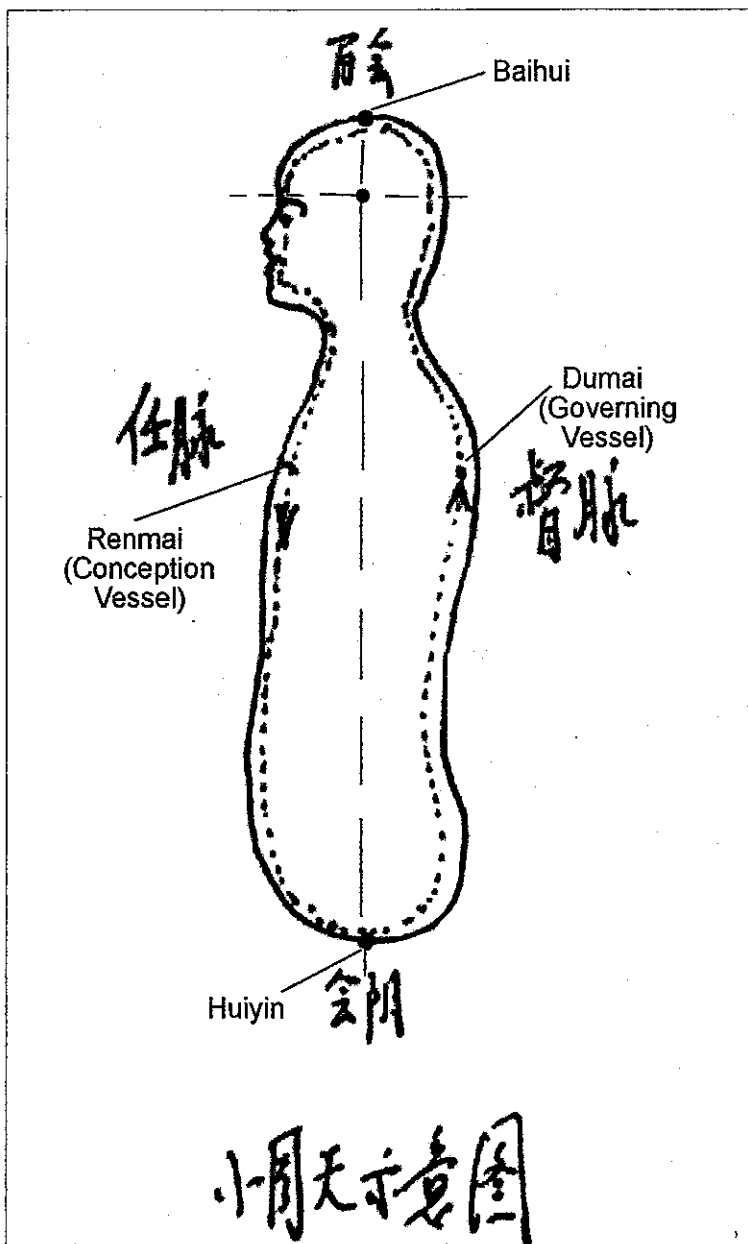
Huang: Master Wu Tunan once said, "Taijiquan is a restoration to the original being through practice." Dadao Taijiquan calls for a reverse cultivation and therefore is called the cultivation of "restoration."

It follows four stages: refining jing (essence of the body) and converting it into qi (energy), qi into shen (spirit), shen into xu (emptiness), and refining xu for the unification of human spirit with Dao.

The first two are fulfilled with the circulation of the grand and small Zhoutian. At the third stage, it is transformed to the state of Taiji; at the fourth state it is transformed to the state of Wuji.

To conclude the four stages, we can see that the process is refining the essence and converting it into qi, refining the qi and converting it into spirit, refining the spirit and returning it to emptiness, and refining the emptiness in accordance with Dao.

This has been the dream of generations of Taoists. In fact, the first two stages are hard enough to reach.



Small Heavenly Cycle (Small Circulation).

People who have acquired such gongfu, in a general state of void, emptiness and nothingness, are externally relaxed, flexible, soft, and internally clear and unblocked. Their physical function turns to that of children.

Those who reach such a stage can keep away from illnesses and preserve a healthy and long life. It's the goal of cultivation, not to be fulfilled within one's lifetime, as the natural law of mortality is inevitable.

Wu: What does Dadao Taijiquan cultivation include?

Huang: It mainly includes the following aspects: Wuji Jing zhuang (Wuji Stillness Stance Gongfu), Taiji

Song gong, Dadao Taijiquan frame, and Taiji push hands.

Wuji Jing Zhuang gong is the best approach to Dadao Taijiquan, and together with Song gong constitutes the fundamental gongfu.

Wu: How should one practice Wuji Jing Zhuang gong?

Huang: The general requirements are: straight posture, quiet body, smooth breathing, forgetting the existence of oneself or other people, and harmony with one's surroundings.

Specifically, the body should be straight and in a comfortable position; the feet should be parallel and shoulder breadth apart; the center of gravity should be aligned with the body's centerline.

The three points, Baihui, Huiyin, and the middle point of the straight line connecting the two Yongquan cavities on left foot and on right foot should be in the same vertical line.

Baihui: Literally it means hundred of meetings. It is an acupuncture cavity that belongs to Governing Vessel. It is located on the crown of the head.

****Huiyin:** It is an acupuncture cavity that belongs to the Conception Vessel meridian. It located in the groin area.

You should relax your body, sink your limbs—especially the arms—in a natural way so that you become unconscious of their existence, clear away various thoughts in your mind, and then you will get into a state of transparency with no mind, no form, only a harmonious unity with the great void.

Wu: What is Song gong practice intended to get rid of in the human body?

Huang: Song gong practice aims to help the practitioner get into the state of relaxation, flexibility, softness, quietness, stability, agility, sensibility,

adjust yourself to the state of "Five Grand."

The "Five Grand" are Grand Song (extreme relaxation), Grand Jing (extreme calmness), Grand Rou (extreme pliability), Grand Ruan (extreme softness), and Grand Xu (extreme insubstantiality).

By "extreme calmness," we mean quietness and stillness of the mind and body. The state of Xu (insubstantiality) is even better, but it is not something that can be immediately acquired and you need consistent practice.

So first, make your body still, then the mind, and finally you forget your thoughts and surroundings. This is the so-called Taiji state.

Practitioners with good gongfu can get into such a state quickly. It is also in such a state that Yin is born and Yin qi gets accumulated.

Then your Yongquan begins to feel heated and the flow of qi initiated by Yongquan at the extreme moment of Jing (stillness), and this is the motion of Taiji.

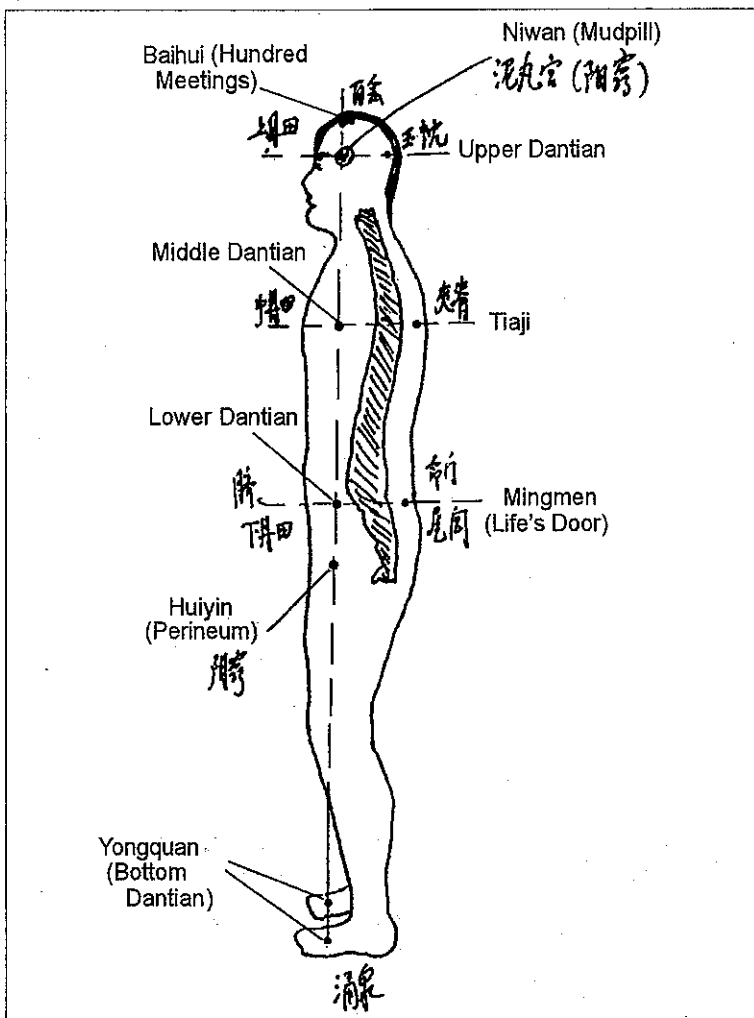
Yang qi produced by the motion triggers and guides the first movement.

Bear in mind the principle that "Shen (spirit) leads action, qi (energy) leads movement, the waist (the axis) leads form." When the movement gets to its fullness, you get into the first state of stillness. At this moment the body is still and the mind is empty and "You (exist or have) returns to Wu (non-exist or nothingness)."

You get into a new Taiji State, from extreme motion to stillness, from extreme Yang to Yin. After a short while, again Yin is born from stillness and Yin qi gets accumulated on a higher level of Taiji.

Correspondingly, the level of Yang it absorbs from the outside gets higher. This is called "Hui Feng He He" in Taoism.

"Hui" means "come," "Feng," liter-



The three points marked in the diagram should be in the same vertical line with the four dantians.

ally, wind, means "universal energy." The first "He" means "harmony" and the second "He" means "combine."

In this way another round of motion starts and the Yang thus produced triggers and leads the second movement at a still higher level than the first one.

When this gets to the extreme, you get into the second round of stillness and a new Taiji state. Yin is again born from this stillness and Yin qi gets accu-

"Dong" (movements) are for Taijiquan practice, "Ding" (motionless postures) are for Gongfu practice. Yang qi moves up the qi circulation in Du Mai channel, and Yin qi pushes down the circulation in the Ren Mai channel.

mulated above the level of the first round and the Yang qi it absorbs also gets enhanced.

This process goes on and on, from stillness to motion to stillness, which is the so-called "inter-transformation of Dong (motion) and Jing (stillness)." Likely, the inter-transformation of You (exist or have) and Wu (non-exist or nothingness) refers to the change of state, either from You to Wu or vice versa.

As a result, Yang qi will get increasingly accumulated in the body, which improves not only one's health condition, but also one's vitality and life span.

Wu: What should the practitioner pay attention to during the practice?

Huang: He needs to bear in mind that every Tun is accompanied by the raising of Qian (Literally, Qian means Heaven. Here it refers to the top of head) and every Tu is accompanied by the sinking of Kun (Literally means Earth. Here it

refers to the bottom of of each foot).

Practitioners with advanced gongfu can get into the states of Jing (quietness), Xu (insubstantiality), Kong (emptiness) and Wu (nothingness) more quickly and completely. The inter-transformation of You and Wu comes to them more easily.

"Dong" (movements) are for Taijiquan practice, "Ding" (motionless postures) are for Gongfu practice. Yang qi moves up the qi circulation in Du Mai, and Yin qi pushes down the circulation in Ren Mai.

The moving up, pushing down, turning, and rotating not only unblock and open the Xiao Zhoutian (Small Circulation of Qi) and Da Zhoutian (Grand Circulation of Qi), but also unblock and open all the qi vessels.

This is called T'ai Chi Internal Gongfu, which is using post-birth practice to return to pre-birth ability.

The Center for Taiji Studies Announces the Upcoming Publication of



Available in Dec. 2004
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Excerpts from Pre-Publication Reviews:

- Yang Yang has produced an important and masterful contribution to our knowledge of Taijiquan. It is great for both beginners and advanced practitioners and demonstrates again what the West can learn from the East.
— Ted Kaptchuk, author of *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*.
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- This book is a treasure house of information... The presentation unites qigong, push-hands, silk-reeling, and form practice into one complete system... There is much in this book of great value to all practitioners and researchers in Taijiquan, regardless of style... Written with the soundness of academic rigor, Yang Yang yet presents the art in a fun, easy-reading manner... Readers will benefit from each page, particularly since the book inspires practice.
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- This book makes clear the fundamental exercises that must be practiced, and explains the theories and principles of the art from both Eastern and Western perspectives. It is a valuable work bridging East and West.
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Taiji Internal Gongfu comes from this pre-birth ability. Thus the energy created from this gongfu can not be limited.

Wu: Then what is Dadao Taijiquan push hands for?

Huang: Mr. Wang Yongquan, a famous Taijiquan master, related in his book, "A Detailed Narration of Yang-style Taijiquan," "The Nei Qi (internal energy) cannot get dispersed by practice of the application forms alone, and it cannot get accumulated and preserved by practice of push hands alone."

In the process of push hands, external exercise of the body and internal cultivation of Jing (essence), Qi (energy), Shen (spirit), and Yi (intent) are both achieved.

One practitioner's Nei Qi can get into and massage his opponent's body and promote his blood circulation. Both of them feel warm and comfortable, as is the effect of Yangsheng (health preservation) push hands.

Use Nei Qi properly and there will be no resistance or friction.



Grasp the Bird's Tail, Bear Down.

Mr. Wu Tunan said in his, "On Taijiquan Push hands," "The so-called push hands is a study of jin (strength)." The first step is the perception of jin. You have to "weigh and measure the opponent's jin with precision."

One step further, you have to "know his intent before he can act, know which part he's going to move before he moves it, and nothing in his mind can escape you."

At that time, "the opponent can never succeed in attacking, adapting or escaping." Taiji push hands cultivation also tends towards formlessness and invisibility.

Push hands performed by moving the body cannot be called cultivation. Instead, everything is started and carried on by Nei Qi. That's why it's called Yangsheng push hands. Use Li (force) and Jin (strength) to do it and you become nothing but a warrior.

Yang Chengfu once remarked on advanced push hands as involving "the slightest movement, the smoothest Hua (dissolution of the opponent's attack), the longest Yin

STATIONARY TAI CHI CHUAN



By Jiang Jian-ye. Intended for beginners and seniors, the video teaches 16 simple one-step exercises using movements from the Yang style and Sun style in combination. Includes stretching and circular warm-up movements.

Movements are taught step-by-step with multiple repetitions and camera angles. 120 Min. 1555 \$49.99

YANG STYLE TAI CHI 13 DAN



By Jiang Jian-ye. This is a set said to have been passed down from Yang Jian-hou, father of Yang Chengfu. It features movements of 13 animals and birds in combination: Lion, Monkey, Toad, Crane, Bear, Phoenix, Snake, Cat, Magpie,

Tiger, Horse, Chicken and Dragon. Each of the 13 animal forms has one or more movements. All are done in sequence. Movements are taught step-by-step with multiple repetitions and camera angles. 114 Min. 1555 \$49.99

YANG STYLE BIG FRAME (DA JIA)



By Jiang Jian-ye. Part 1 teaches 34 of 108 forms of what is said to be Yang Lu-chan's original Big Frame, part of a system that has largely been lost. It was transmitted by Yang to the Wang Fu household and carried forward to Li Zheng. It is suggested that

the Yang style Old Frame should be learned first. It is listed elsewhere in the magazine. Movements are taught step-by-step with multiple repetitions and camera angles. 120 Min. 1561 \$44.99

CHEN STYLE SAN SHOU



Jiang Jian-ye. This video teaches 22 partner self-defense applications from the Chen style. Each one is first taught at slow and then normal speed solo and then with a partner. Movements are taught step-by-step with multiple repetitions and camera

angles. 114 Min. 1557 \$49.99.



Huang Zhenhuan with Wu Tunan on his 100th birthday.

(lead-in of the opponent's force), and the most explosive Fa (attack)."

When you reach the level of formlessness and invisibility, you can "perceive to the depth in stillness," and "neither a feather nor a little flying creature could ever land on you."

"You know but aren't known by others" and "are getting close to divinity."

Wu: What are the characteristics of Dadao Taijiquan push hands?

Huang: Mr. Wang Yongquan said in his same book, "Formlessness and invisibility and transparency mean practitioners with advanced gongfu show little movement when they win over the opponent in push hands."

"The forms they use become less and less visible so that they seem to have disappeared while the practitioners themselves feel light and brisk in a wonderful state."

The formlessness and invisibility of Taiji push hands can be observed as no improper movement of the body or hand, and compliance with the opponent's movement in great quietness.

Practitioners with advanced gongfu show no use of forms. When you receive his hands and try to measure his jin (strength), he neither extends nor withdraws, neither turns nor twists, neither treads nor extends his legs, seemingly in ultimate stillness.

But once you use some effort on

him, you feel overwhelmed by some "field energy" (Danyuan field energy within the body) and his Nei Gong passes on to you continuously through your touching point.

Surprisingly, it works on the bottom of your feet, which breaks your balance and bounces you out just like a ball bouncing against the wall.

You are neither pushed out by force from his waist or hips, nor by the counter force of the earth, nor by the quivering force of his shoulders, hands or waist.

You are pushed out by the energy released from his field at the very moment when he suddenly gets into the state of You (exist or have) from that of Wu (non-exist or nothingness).

This ability can only be acquired through the hard work of practice. In the same way, a strong man can be easily shifted from his original position without feeling any force against him at their touching point, only the "energy of some field" which breaks his balance.

It really amazes a lot of people. What's more, formlessly and invisibly the practitioner can break his opponent's balance as if getting him into an empty pit no matter what part of his body is touched upon by the opponent. This is a moment close to divinity and full of enjoyment. •

