

# AYMTA JOURNAL

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**Teachers' College Presentations**  
**A Martial Arts Philosopher?**  
**Posture, Position, Movement**  
**About Tuishou**  
**Taiji in War and Peace**  
**Teaching Notes**

## AYMTA

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### Editor's Notes

Cover: When Kay and I were touring Brittany after Rencontres Jasnieres 2002, we visited the Abbey of Landevennec and saw a reproduction of the left-most page (from *Notitia Dignitatum*—table of colors of the troops of the *Tractus Armoricanus et Nervicani*) with what appeared to be the yin-yang symbol as the emblem of the *Mariosimiaci* roman legion. Giovanni Monastra notes that another copy of the *Notitia Dignitatum* shows the inversion of that symbol as the emblem of the *Armigeri* (right-most page), and the *Thebei* are represented by a "static" yin-yang symbol (center page).



"Lo 'Yin-Yang' tra le insegne del Impero romano?" *Futuro Presente*, IV, no. 8, 1996.

See the Taiji diagram (圖太極 tú tàijí) in *Cultivating Stillness* (tr. Eva Wong, Shambhala, 1992), p. 16, where both symbols occur.

**Translation:** 多謝 *Duōxiè* to Tomas Ries for his services this issue. I had to translate way too much and since my talents are both meager and academic with little idiomatic knowledge, authors and readers would better served if more competent would volunteer.

## Baja Wudang Jian Workshop

By Steve Merrill

The idea for a Wudang Sword workshop in Baja actually started when a number of us were in Madison last summer and I was beginning to learn the form with Charlie Adamec leading the group. As I was returning to Mexico via the Bay Area, I reviewed what I had learned with his friend and student, Ben Wengrofsky. Back up in the Bay Area in the fall, I got together with Charlie and his group in Berkeley. We talked about trying to organize some kind of spring gathering scheduled around Charlie's studies. By January it looked as if it was not to be, but by February Charlie felt as if he could get away for a few days. We decided to go for it, with the dates of March 7, 8, 9. For any of you who wished to come but did not have enough time to plan for it, we hope to do another event in Mexico with enough advance notice to make it possible.

Charlie arrived on March 5, which turned out to be one of the coldest days of the year. Driving along the coast for an hour and a half to reach Todos Santos, we alternately talked about Taijiquan and local points of interest as we passed them. The last seven kilometers were on the dirt road that leads to our house.

The next morning Charlie was free to relax (as much as was possible with a 6-year-old following him around like a puppy). He did manage to sneak off for some form practice and standing meditation on the beach.

We began the sword workshop at noon the following day, a Friday. Our group was a small one since it was comprised solely of the members of our Todos Santos Taiji Group, a total of five people. This actually turned out to be a great thing for those of us that were there. Charlie and I had discussed the small number of participants prior to his coming and he was fine with it, feeling that he could give more time and attention individually that way. The other members of the TSTG have been studying the Long Form for about three years and have completed the First and Second Duan but were willing to try to learn the sword without having completed the Third Duan.

We held our workshop at the Cultural Center in Todos Santos, which was originally a high school when it was built early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the walls within the courtyard are painted with murals from the 1930s depicting historical scenes from the Revolution of 1910 as well as '30s era murals depicting *campesinos* working together communally. During this time Mexico was a very socialist state and had close ties to leaders like Trotsky and Lenin. The Cultural Center has an inner courtyard with very nice gardens, large trees and a pond. This is where we normally do our Taijiquan classes.

Although we are usually an object of some interest and curiosity for the local kids who come to hang out, they were especially intrigued by a bunch of gringos all waving swords around and trying to follow our leader/teacher, Charlie. No doubt his height of 6 feet 8 inches had them impressed as well.

Taking a break in the midafternoon on Friday we went across the street to Cafe Brown (Brown/Brown for those of you who don't speak Spanish). They serve such unlocal items as lasagna and tofu sandwiches. As we sat there in the afternoon sun the sounds of Chinese lute music came drifting out of the cafe. It was an incredible coincidence, as they had no idea of the workshop that we were conducting.

Saturday we began at 8 a.m. and continued through until almost 6 p.m. with a break of a couple of hours in the midday. With brains swimming and legs trembling from fatigue the group said "adios" until the next morning.

The Cultural Center didn't open until 9 a.m. on Sunday so Charlie and I were able to hang out at the ranch for a while. He was becoming a regular down at the beach in the mornings and on this morning he had an audience of about five soldiers who were out on a beach patrol. Part of their work is to protect turtle nests.

By the end of Sunday, Charlie had poured about half of the form into our brains and bodies, ending with *Pierce Levelly*. He suggested this as a good point since Master Wang had used *Pierce Levelly* as a stopping point for a demonstration that didn't allow enough time for the entire form. Since our workshop didn't allow us enough time to assimilate the whole form this seemed like a natural place to stop.

That night, one of our group, Irene Patch, and her husband, Phil, hosted a nice fish-and-chips dinner at a local establishment, La Canada del Diablo. We even hoisted a few margaritas, beers and sodas in Charlie's honor, for his graciousness, patience and perseverance in teaching us.

Monday morning it was time for Charlie to leave. We had time for some form and sword at my neighbor's *palapa* on the beach and then it was off to town to connect with Irene, who was taking Charlie to the airport. Like all other taijiquan workshops and events, it was over much too quickly but Charlie definitely seemed interested in coming back to our part of the world.

We look forward to another visit with him and any others of you who may read this.

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## Presidents' Message

In April I was part of the annual World Taiji Celebration in New York City, which took place a week later than the actual event because of the weather. But the turnout was exceptional and over 30 demonstrations, from all styles and forms, took place under the clear and sunny skies. In the demo portion of the morning the New York school did the opening of the Yen-nien fan form in the two to three minutes allotted. There were many examples of traditional weapons and forms – and some that were clearly of recent vintage. Richard Jesaitis, the event's host, performed a graceful and powerful Classical Yang Saber Long form. Other demos, all of which were appreciated (some even more than others) were a Chen family demonstration of Xiao Jia Form (Pan Yun Tei), a handful of other sword and Saber demonstrations (Taiji Ba Gua Sword, "Saber Two-Person Set," "Ren Guang-Yi Saber"), Wu Soft and Hard Set, Buddha Fist, a number of push-hands and applications demonstrations (ranging from the subtle and skilled to the ham-fisted and graceless "Combat Tai Chi"). But even this demo, which was essentially police and military-style applications of force, was greeted politely. What I find most striking, having attended three of these events, is the interest that participants have in each other's disciplines. People are gathered to get a glimpse of what others are doing in the large world of internal practice. Some of it is familiar and some is clearly different in style, intent, lineage, etc. But it is a very fraternal event and is non-competitive.

When I see so many styles and different schools at one event it helps me to appreciate what it is that we practice, and to clarify some of the things that AYMTA itself stands for. Many members practice other forms and styles besides Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan – this is to be expected. If we (as members of this organization) are not open to the disciplines and practices of other schools and styles then we risk losing connection with so much that is interesting and valuable. On the other hand there is a place for continuing a tradition – and doing so with dedication and careful study. When one asks, "Is the form done one way or another?" maybe because Wang Yen-nien was said to have used one variation or another along the way, the answer is often very simple. Wang Yen-nien's books were written and created with the purpose of presenting and preserving the essence of

the Yangjia Michuan form. And the form itself is the central element of practice. Wang Yen-nien makes clear his thoughts on the central importance of the form within Yangjia Michuan, on page 11 of the interview in the Winter 2002 issue of this *Journal*. So with practice (ideally with an experienced teacher) and careful study of the work that Wang Yen-nien has published for this purpose, we can stay true to the essential nature of the Yangjia Michuan form.

Why is this important? One respected teacher has compared the Yangjia Michuan form to a great symphony, building on itself in ways that are subtle, powerful, and carefully and classically constructed. I like to also think of the Yangjia Michuan form as a great piece of literature, something that was created over time from inspiration, hard work and a touch of genius. I would as soon tinker with the words of Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad or William Kennedy as I would consider willfully changing or adapting the Yangjia Michuan form. Some teachers might like to take a little of this style, a little of that style, and maybe even come up with their own variations on the works that have been passed down by those who we can truly consider masters. That's their business. But for those who revere the "Classics", Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan is just that.

AYMTA has a simple mandate, which is to promote and preserve that which has been passed down by Wang Yen-nien. It doesn't mean that we aren't interested or respectful of other disciplines. It simply means that we care to put in the time and effort to ensure that our practice is consistent and true to Wang Yen-nien's teachings.

Among many issues that the board has been addressing (please refer to the recent newsletter) is the nature and viability of the *AYMTA Journal*. Many intelligent and interesting people have written for it over the 12 years of publication, including of course Wang Yen-nien himself. We have been blessed with interviews, articles, and images by and about many experienced and talented people in the Yangjia Michuan community. We are currently putting our house in order, from a legal and logical standpoint. The *Journal* has never had a formal writer's guideline or agreement, nor has it specified any matters in regard to reprint rights of articles, etc. that have been published within its pages. At the encouragement of Julia Fairchild, who

has always been a big part of AYMTA and has contributed much to the *Journal's* success, the board of directors and the consulting editors are working on writer's guidelines and issues of copyright in regards to the *Journal* and ultimately the Web site as well. Magazines cannot exist without the people who actually contribute to them. As we can offer no payment for articles or pictures it is a double honor to receive and publish thoughtful work pertaining to taiji in general and Yangjia Michuan in particular.

I suggest a policy based on common sense and respect. From AYMTA's standpoint we would like to be able to reprint work that has been published in the pages of the *Journal*. I have seen all of the past issues and feel that there are some wonderful articles, photography and artwork that would be valuable to current members. I would like to see some of it republished, either in a special edition or as part of our normally published issues. As we have no previous agreements with past contributors this means asking for, and hopefully receiving, the rights to do so. We are currently beginning to reach out to attain this one-time reprint agreement. In regards to new contributions, I suggest that we ask for these rights, and make it clear what we are referring to (i.e., to possibly republish in a future *Journal* the words and/or images) at the time that we solicit or receive submissions. Whether these rights are granted is up to the contributor. If he or she does not wish to, it will have no bearing upon the current publication of their work. The Web site is a separate entity that would require a different agreement and discussion.

I have high hopes for the growth of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan in this country and for the continued development of dedicated and qualified teachers and students. We would like to work with all of the members to support and encourage them in any ways that are possible for AYMTA to do so. We look forward to feedback, ideas and the participation of members in taiji events and the *Journal*. Anything that can bring us together to learn, to grow and to practice is a healthy and useful endeavor.

Best wishes,

Thomas W. Campbell  
President, AYMTA

## European YMT Teachers' College Spring 2003

The Collège Européen des Enseignants du Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan meets twice a year. A significant portion of the meeting is devoted to activities for teachers to share their understandings of and to clarify the various elements of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan. A primary vehicle is a series of thematic presentations or workshops where various teachers approach a common theme and present a concept, lead the other teachers in exercises or movements designed to illustrate the topic, and then engage in group discussion. In March, 40 teachers met to address "Blocks in Teaching and Learning." Since the topic coincided with *Winter Journal's* question on "Blocks in Progress" (pp. 28-29) and a number of AYMTA Advisers were presenters, the *Journal* asked all presenters if they would submit material. The topics were Luc Defago – "How to Keep the Center While Moving," Sabine Metzlé – "Ritual Aspects of the Practice," Claudy Jeanmougin – "Rear Leg Rooting and Issuing of Force," Christian Bernapel – "Principles in Use of Front and Rear Legs," Zouzou Vallotton and Nicole Henriod – "The 2nd Basic Exercise: Bending From the Waist to the Side," Marie-Christine Moutault – "Generating Body Unity in the Spiral." We repeat the caution that was given to us — reading the provided materials can in no way substitute for participation in the two days of workshops. However, we hope that it serves a number of purposes – to encourage AYMTA teachers to reflect, share, question and cooperate, to promote AYMTA teacher attendance at the European YMT Teachers' College meetings, and certainly to introduce new ideas to both students and teachers in examining their practice and provide material with which to experiment. Sabine and Luc were unable to provide their materials by the printing deadline; we anticipate that they will be included in the next issue.

Future meetings will be expanded to three days, perhaps making it more worthwhile for Americans to attend. The theme for the Fall 2003 meeting outside of Paris will be divided between "Tuishou" and "Adaptations in Teaching the Form to Older Students." The Spring and Fall 2004 meetings will be in Strasbourg and Bordeaux, respectively.

### DIFFICULTIES OF MAINTAINING THE SUPPORT ON THE REAR LEG WHEN TAKING THE FIRST STEPS IN YANGJIA MICHUAN TAIJIQUAN

By Claudy Jeanmougin

Translated by Tomas Ries

A distinguishing feature of our style is the emphasis we place on maintaining the bulk of our weight on the rear leg when we push. This principle always applies except when superseded by the law of no double weighting, which overrides all else.

Beginners tend to have difficulties pushing from the back leg for the following reasons:

1. Mentally, a forward push is perceived as an action that engages the whole body. Thus one presumes that the body too must advance—and it advances. In fact however this is then no longer to push but to lean forwards.
2. Secondly, the beginner is generally unaware of the body's vertical axis. Hence the tendency to lean forwards when pushing, using body mass to counterbalance the forward effort.
3. Should one mention the almost universal absence of the use of the pelvis? Yes, one must constantly emphasize the waist, and that movement is initiated in the waist.
4. Finally, how does the beginner understand 'bending'? All too often it involves a break between the torso and the pelvis, with the bottom moving to the rear—once again leading to a loss of the vertical axis.

For now let us retain: the vertical axis, the use of the pelvis and bending the waist. They are the three basic criteria needed to understand the principle of basing the support on the rear leg.

On the other hand, when teaching, we must also beware of overemphasizing this characteristic, lest the beginner think that the body's mass rests entirely on the rear leg. Such an excessive interpretation may in turn cause problems when it comes to the placing of the foot when stepping forward. This warning reminds us that we must also keep the beginner aware of how to shift body weight from one leg to another, followed by displacing the body accompanied by a shifting of body weight.

#### Practice

##### Exercise 1.

Transfer the weight of the body from one leg to the other, in fixed step, feet in different positions, with active use of the pelvis.

*Purpose: to learn to move the body with the waist and not with the knees.*

##### Exercise 2.

Transfer the body's weight while displacing the body. Forward, backward, half steps and full steps.

*Purpose: to learn to maintain the vertical axis.*

##### Exercise 3.

In fixed step, fold and unfold the waist.

Then the same but while displacing the body.

*Purpose: to learn to activate the waist without moving the shoulders forwards.*

#### Exercise 4.

Receive a ball by absorbing with the waist.

Return the ball by unwinding the waist.

*Purpose: to activate the waist and the arms.*

#### Exercise 5.

Same as Exercise 4. but with one leg to the rear and keeping the body's weight on the rear leg while returning the ball.

*Purpose: finding the ability to maintain support on the rear leg.*

#### Exercise 6.

Pushing (*an*) with two hands while alternating the front foot.

Becoming aware of how the front foot automatically fills.

And small pushes on a partner.

*Purpose: realizing that the front foot supports a part of the body's weight.*

#### Exercise 7.

Practice a segment of the form while applying the new learning.

#### Evaluation

Advance preparation for a course is a normal part of teaching. However equally, if not more important, is the work which comes after the class—the debriefing and review of what was actually accomplished and how well the teaching fulfilled its purpose. This is the net evaluation, or final account, and this is the moment of greatest benefit for the teacher, since it inevitably involves a re-evaluation of the teaching methods.

Thus, instead of the teacher sinking back into smug self-satisfaction at the end of a session (especially if this has been accompanied by applause), it is necessary to ask oneself if the pedagogical purpose has really been accomplished.

#### Have the teaching objectives been attained?

Do the above exercises in fact resolve the difficulties involved in maintaining the support on the rear leg during the first steps of practicing our style of Taijiquan? Do the above exercises remove the associated difficulties? The answer is clear and unequivocal: No!

As the title of this essay indicates, there are several difficulties involved in resting the weight on the rear leg, and these have not all been exposed exhaustively by the above session. In fact it only includes work related to the activation of the pelvis and the need to maintain the vertical axis of the trunk. These are the only ones included here because they are directly related to the essential principles of practice.

Since the full objective has not been attained it is thus necessary to work further on the missing parts in a future course.

Secondly, the teaching only achieved part of its goals because during the session it became necessary to answer numerous questions, which went beyond the confines of the original theme, and which dispersed the focus of the course. In future it is better to note down those questions not directly related to the exercises. They can then be grouped by theme at a later stage, after which further training sessions can be organized to deal with each of these areas in turn.

#### Practice

In our training session at the Amicale 2002 only Exercises 1, 2 and 6 were actually practiced. The specific teaching objectives of these exercises were attained.

The main difficulty arose during Exercise 6. This is because the application of the exercise was not focused on the teaching objective—i.e., learning that part of the body weight is supported by the front leg. This failure was due to a last-minute change in plan, when it was decided that the training session was to be shared with another teacher who was to work on the front leg. One thus had to be careful not to infringe on this workshop.

Difficulties encountered in this exercise are

- the practitioners lean but do not push (body projected forwards)
- the practitioners shove each other back instead of pushing (faulty timing),
- inefficient pushing (faulty grounding due to insufficient awareness of the correct moment to execute the pushes involved in the movements of the form).

We only mention these three difficulties since they are all related to a defect in Intent in the execution of the movement. Furthermore, they are part of those key points noted in the preamble. What we need to ask ourselves is if this exercise served the goals of the workshop. In fact its purpose was to verify what had been acquired in the previous exercises. What we saw was that while some of the basic notions had been absorbed, further work is necessary if the principle of supporting the push from the rear leg is to be understood and implemented correctly.

For example, in cases when the push was accompanied by a step at the very moment of the push: do not manifest the push until the moment that the forward heel touches the ground; and do not accompany the push with both hands—as soon as you push, let the opponent go and do not attempt to follow him. In fact, what we have here is the notion of rhythm, a theme that was not included in this teaching session.

#### Conclusion and perspectives

This topic is not exhausted and merits further work.

Integrating the spiraling movement of the pelvis with the transfer of weight was well recognized (the participants being already familiar with this).

The difficulties encountered with the push indicate that we must include the notion of rhythm in the execution of the movements.

We must provide more precise instructions. The instructions provided for Exercise 6 were insufficient.

We could have approached the topic in a different manner. Why not start with Exercise 6, immediately exposing the key difficulty? We would then have begun by recognizing the problem, from which we could have worked gradually towards the central theme, supporting the push from the rear leg. At the end of the session we could then have returned to the initial exercise to see if indeed the course had attained its objective.

The main problem in the teaching workshops at the Amicale results from the fact that the participants are not beginners but teachers who want immediate answers to the difficulties they encounter during their own courses. It is possible that dispersing the workshops farther away from the Paris area could permit the inclusion of a greater number of participants who are not teachers, and who are more open to the “game.”

# Generating Body Unity in The Spiral in Taijiquan

By Marie-Christine Moutault

Translated by Don Klein with help from Tomas Ries, Jeffrey Klein, Brian Roscoe, Kay Reese.

In observing my students, it is obvious to me that it is first necessary for them to integrate inherent notions into their body images, particularly the notion of unity, before they are able to manifest the expression of the spiral in their practice of Taijiquan.

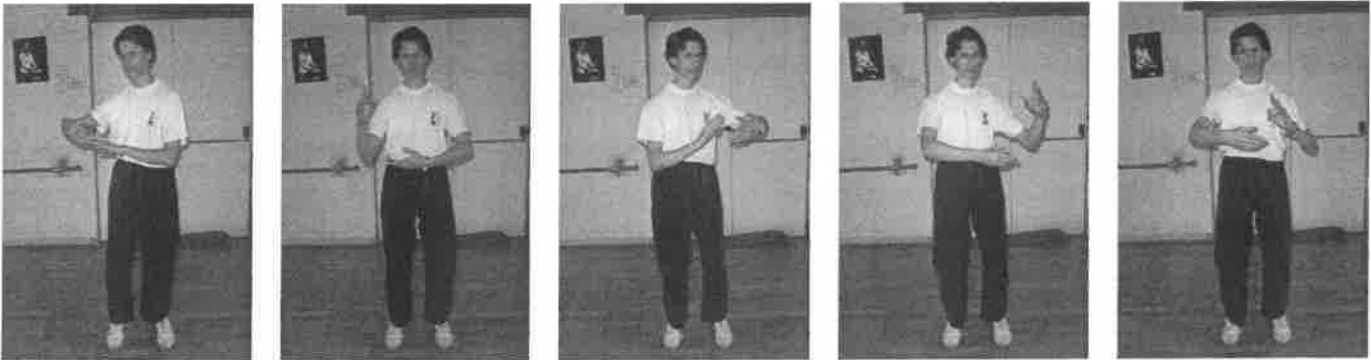
Stages proposed to integrate and develop the principle “the waist commands”:

1. First, look for **unity of the upper body** [bust: head and shoulders], namely the unequivocal connection of the waist (pelvis and lumbar regions) and shoulders in the rotation about the axis (the spinal column).
2. Then “**listen**” to what this mobility produces in the root or supporting legs\*.
3. **Prolong this unity** in arms and hands while developing flexibility and listening tissue.
4. Finally, **return to the initial notion of unity** by introducing the second level of understanding of the principle: “In all movements the inner strength is rooted in the feet, developed in the thighs, controlled by the waist, and expressed through the hands and fingers. ”

To develop a fine and finer awareness of the interactions and synergies necessary for the subtlest execution, I rely on Five Element Qigong (learnt with Bob Lowey, Tai Chi Caledonia) that I integrate into the courses.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK OF ARMS:

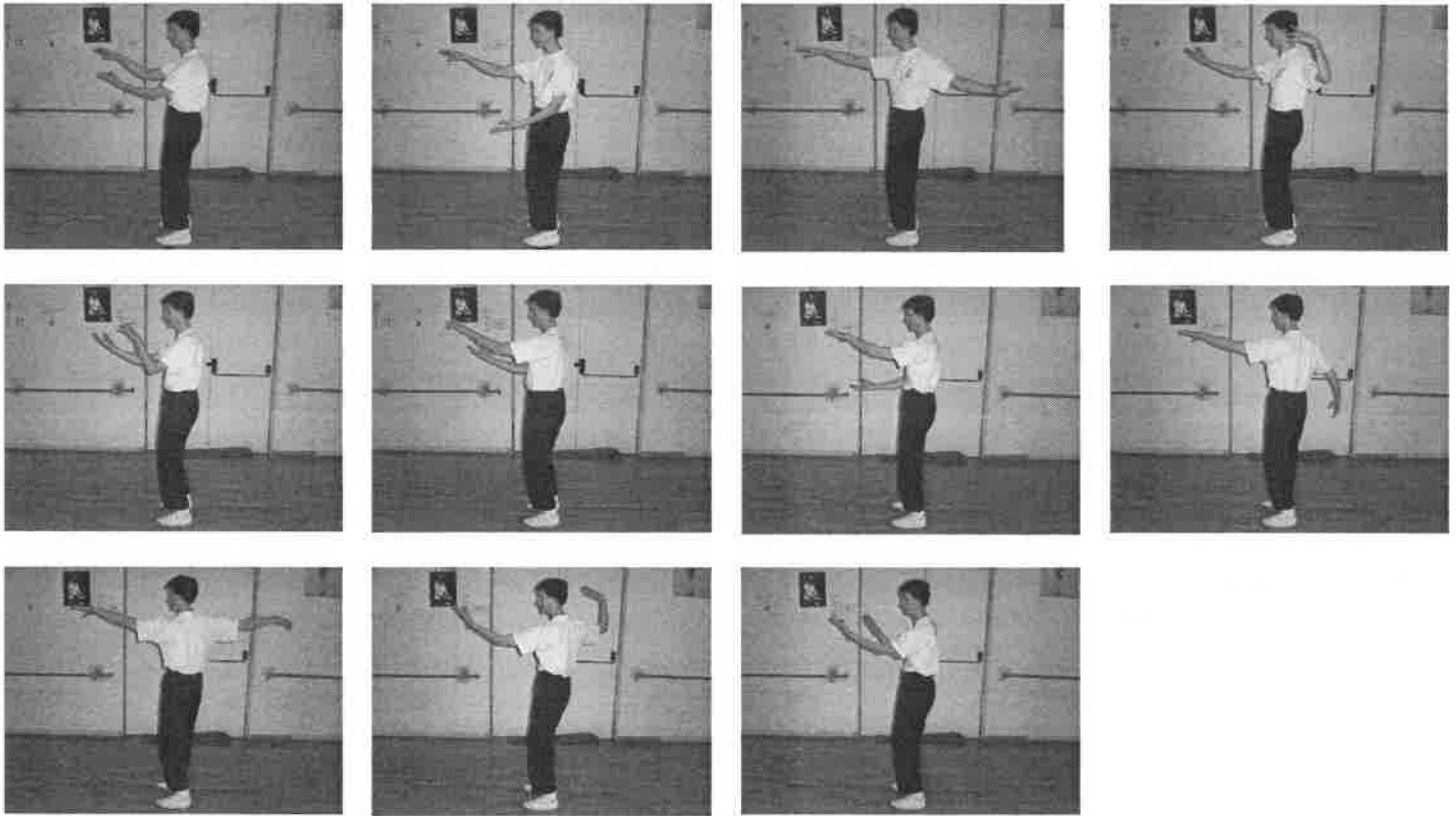
1. The first element corresponds to Earth. Imagine the upper body in a vertical position, feet rooted at shoulder width and the position of hands as before *Lǎn Què Wěi*. This position of hands will alternate as if you pass from preparation of *Lǎn Què Wěi* to the right, then to the left; the nuance is that you do not make this change in front of you, as in the form, but laterally to the right and then to the left, in the horizontal plane.



2. The second element corresponds to Wood. Again in the same basic position, position the feet parallel, pelvis width. Arms are in front of the upper body in the horizontal position, right hand palm toward the ground (yin), and left hand palm toward the sky (yang). The object this time is to completely relax the left arm along the body and allow it to go back up, relaxed at the level of the shoulder and return in *Zhǎng* (palm strike) above the right hand; because of the unity of the body the palm of the left hand is steered toward the ground and that of the right hand toward the sky (we shall return here in more detail later). It is then a question of making the same movement on the other side. In this movement some will tend to cross the antero-posterior axial plane; it is important to ensure that the back movement of the arm respects the homo-laterality.

\* *Appui* - support, generally referring to the legs and feet, sometimes translated as *root*. See Translator's note on page 13.

3.

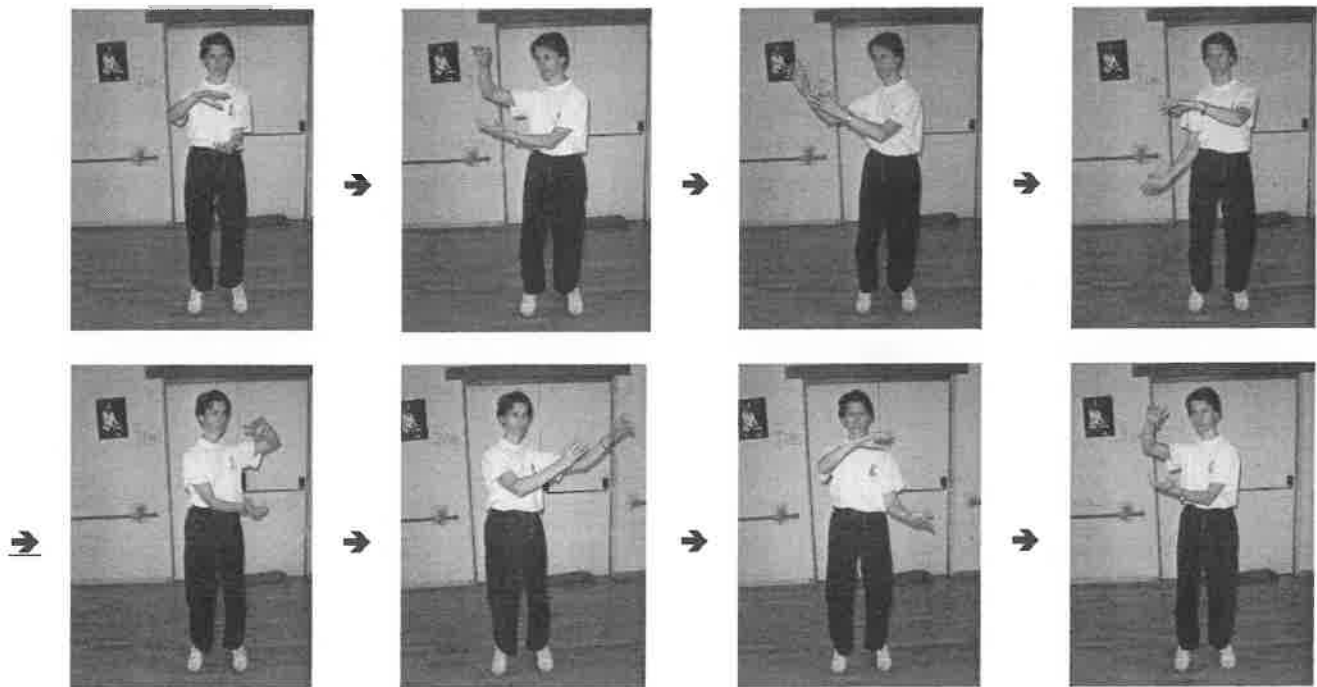


3. The third element corresponds to Fire. Identical initial position; this time arms in front, breast height, the palms toward the ground. The movement of hands is alternated, always in front, at shoulder width. The dynamics are in the ascent of the hand toward the Sky Yang (without going much beyond the plane of the shoulder), in the balance of the movement, the other hand lowers toward the Earth Yin (without going much below the waist). In the ascent, hands stay palms always toward the ground, as if they take their source from the hearth in connection with the Earth, and as if they were some flames called to rise toward the Sky. In the descent they meet each other, palms slightly opened forward and inward (slight pronation) with the fingers relaxed upward.



4. The fourth element corresponds to Metal. Again, maintain the same initial position. The arms will describe a large reclining figure eight or the infinity sign “∞”. In this movement palms are always face-to-face, except in the curve, at the end of ascent, at the beginning of descent, when the left and right hands reverse Yin-Yang polarity.





5. The fifth element corresponds to Water. The water infiltrates, penetrates into a movement of rotation, profoundly Yin. So hands are initially on each side of the upper body, at the level of the waist, palms facing the sky; they descend alternately, in a movement of internal rotation, between two supports, in front of the pubis, without dropping the shoulders.



## 1 - THE UNITY OF THE TRUNK

At first, I try to develop in my students an unrefined awareness, I say even monolithic, of the trunk (from the shoulders to the coxo-femoral [hip] joint). Indeed, I ask them to associate the rotation of the waist systematically with a corresponding rotation of the shoulders in the same direction. So, turning the waist to the left causes a retreat of the left iliac crest and the left shoulder; consequently, if there is upper body unity, the right iliac crest and the right shoulder advance.

In the proposed qigong, *any movement of rotation of the waist must develop on parallel supports, knees slightly bent because of the relaxation of the waist* (lumbar region). Indeed, I prefer to speak about the relaxation of the waist by proposing a view of the pelvis in retroversion

entailing a notion of fixing the entire lumbar region that also has the effect of solidifying the movement, but in another sense! The reverse, antéversion, entails disastrous mechanical consequences from the point of view of health; we will avoid that practice. Without a relaxed waist, without flexibility, there is no any chance to understand: 懂勁 *Dǒng jìn*.

So in this first phase of awareness, it is important for me to develop in my students this notion of high-low unity of the trunk, by telling them that expression in arms and hands results from this initial physical logic.

I attempt to further develop this unity in the preciseness in the execution of the gestures of the qigong. I ask them in

this phase to quickly transfer the weight to the leg which corresponds to the direction of rotation; namely when waist turns left, the weight of the body is almost totally on the right leg and conversely. At this level I attend particularly to the support of the feet on the ground that must not “bore in”; the soles of feet must stay in full contact with the ground.

This stage allows them to become aware of the axis of the body which passes through the spinal column, and of the rotation around this axis, because filling one side leads to emptying the other, a natural condition of maintaining physical unity.

In this first integrated stage, I ask the students to concentrate most particularly on their rooting.

## 2 – 聽精: “LISTENING” To SUPPORTS or *TĪNG JĪNG*

It is now a question of developing a listening mode which will be further refined. In the transfer of the weight, I attempted only to have the students to become aware of the contact of their feet with the ground, so that there was no unsticking of the inner or outer face of the foot on which the movement of the body was supported.

Now there is the issue of becoming attached to the distribution of the weight of the body in rooting. The weight transfer along with the rotation of the waist (and with it of all the upper body), allows the student to experiment with the notion of empty and full in the supporting legs and feet. Bit by bit I ask them to maintain this sensation while refining it; namely, they are asked to transfer less and less weight from one leg to the other one, until they obtain a projection on the ground of the vertebral axis remaining in the center of the base of support.

So, they have to turn around their axis without physical translation to right or to left. In this stage I ask them to be more and more attentive to what happens in their supports so that they discover—even without transfer of the weight of the body, but by simple rotation around the axis—the feeling of the weight in the two supports. If a rotation of the waist to left is made, the right foot is slightly fuller than the left foot, and conversely, yet remaining perfectly centered between two supports.

As soon as a mobility of the waist around the axis is made—maintaining the axis in the center of the supports—the sensation then developed indicates a distribution of different mass between the two supports even though the two sides are actually equal. It is important to qualify sensation and reality!

Once this new concept is realized, we refine the consequences more fully in the expression of arms.

## 3 - THE EXPRESSION OF ARMS ANCHORED ON AN UNIFIED AXIS

To develop this part I have to return to Five Element Qigong. The rest of the body is “intelligent” in being placed and integrated! (But sometimes we have surprises in the real understanding of what is explained. It becomes necessary for us to start over with different terms and/or with other situations.)

The students are now asked to place their attention on the expression of arms and hands. Such investment leads to mobility and the Yin-Yang polarity of the hands.

The work of relaxing the arms having been introduced earlier, each student has an exterior reference model given by the teacher for movement of arms. They are asked to maintain a rather vague image of this model in examining how every movement can and must be initiated.

### 1. The first element: Earth

In returning this element, they experiment by moving their arms with large amplitude to the point where the arms cross the frontal plane and meet themselves at the back. Some, playing a game of experimenting or due to lack-of-control of their body movements, will continue until their arms cross the axial-side plane of the body.

During this experiment, they notice discomfort at the level of knees, even hips, and a loss of stable support (ankles tend to drill and feet to unstick alternately on the internal and external sides). They are asked then to gradually reduce their arm movements until they find all the elements work as before, rotating around the center axis in the middle of the supports, with unity of the upper body and stability of supports.

By developing listening tissue, they notice gradually that arms participate in the earlier described unity of the upper body and that this unity of arms with the upper body is present as long as hands stay within the median axis of the body. That is, if the waist turns right and pulls with it the upper body and shoulders—which in turn pulls the arms—hands always meet to turn in a space very close to the median axis of the body, namely the axis of the spinal column.

Furthermore, if arms and hands are perfectly relaxed, the students notice that the change of YING-YANG polarity of the hands or 化 *huà* is initiated by the movement of rotation of the waist in the other direction.

For greater concentration and better listening one can do it with eyes closed.

### 2. The second element: Wood

In this second element it is important to be aware of the impact of the return of the waist after its opening

toward the back, with the change of hand polarity. Return to the movement described in the beginning, with the relaxation and the opening of the left arm downward and then back caused by the waist rotating left and the opening of the left shoulder resulting from the unity of the upper body—the left arm raises to shoulder level (from the rebound of the relaxation) and returns forward because, in a sense, it is “called back” by the return of the waist (that itself pulls the shoulder forward).

In this reminder of the left arm and its return in the axis of the upper body, with the rotation of the waist, the arms are going to make a rotation (right arm in external rotation and left arm in internal rotation) that initiates an inversion of polarities of the hands, the left palm toward the ground and the right palm toward the sky. It is necessary to be aware that the return of the arm and, consequently, the change of hand polarity corresponds exactly to the point of alteration of the waist: they are set off by it.

It is interesting to note that if one goes much too far in opening the arm toward the back—that is, if the arm leaves the sagittal plane and crosses the antero-posterior axis of the body—it becomes impossible to correctly make this movement with respect to the biomechanical structure. Those who have an obvious lack of flexibility of the scapular belt should only open the arm to about 90-100 ° with respect to the forward arm!

### 3. The third element: Fire

This third movement resumes with those proper body movements discovered during the element Earth. The rotation of the waist, passed on to the shoulder due to body unity, reveals and expresses itself with a slight amplification in arms and hands.

### 4. The fourth element: Metal

The same concepts are found in this movement as before, provoking the same results. It is again necessary, as in the Earth element, to ensure that the hands remain close to the median axis of the body if one wants to respect unity in the expression of arms.

### 5. The fifth element: Water

Here we notice that the polarity of hands is reversed during the rotation of the waist.

In this stage of the work it is important to attend to what happens at the knees; if a shearing sensation is

felt, it is necessary to make understood that the rotation of the waist is not a simple rotation around a point, not a going back-and-forth on both sides of a point, but a movement in “∞”. With this comprehension there will be no pain in the load-bearing joints.

It is also important to insist on the relaxation of the shoulders; without this relaxation no fine sensation can be obtained and developed, particularly with regard to being aware of “excessive stretching” in the movement which would inevitably entail a freezing of the scapular joint, causing too much tension. In that case the normal inversion in the hand polarity—caused by relaxation at the time of directional change in the waist rotation—will not be able to be made in its articular logic. If this relaxation is not achieved it is necessary to remain at this point with more specific work at this level.

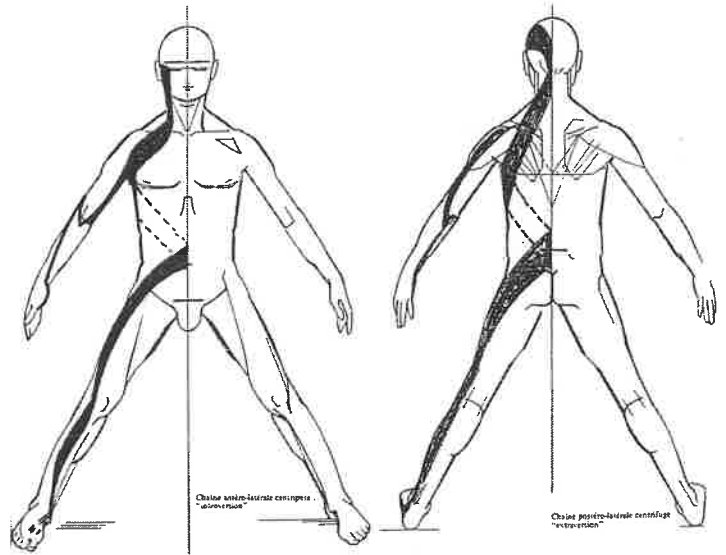
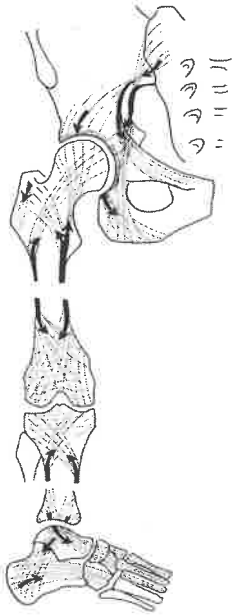
## 4 - OF THE UNITY IN THE SPIRAL

This approach brings us to the conclusion that the transformation led by the rotation in “∞” of the waist about the axis, firm on a stable base and passed on by the physical unity of the body promulgates the expression of the spiral.

Indeed, we return to the notion of unity developed in the first point; this almost monolithic unity of the trunk is, bit-by-bit, by the game of the listening to sensations, transformed into a spiral unity. Movement led by the waist is passed on to the upper body to the shoulders with very little delay. The waist is as a hand flicking a whip; it generates and leads the movement that will develop and propagate throughout the body.

This small delay which is explained by the play of the vertebral, costal and scapular articulations provokes a movement which rises and develops in spiral, to the joints of arms and hands, with the consequent change of polarity.

What is more logical than this spiral expression when one knows that fascias in the shape of lemniscates surround our muscles and our internal organs. All our internal mass is thus subjected to the law of the spiral. Again, what is more logical when our osseous structure is observed: it contains “osseous trusses” which play the role of lines of force and which in the passage of joints cross from one bone to another, to meet themselves in perfect continuance as if the joints were there only to give more mobility to the development of this spiral.



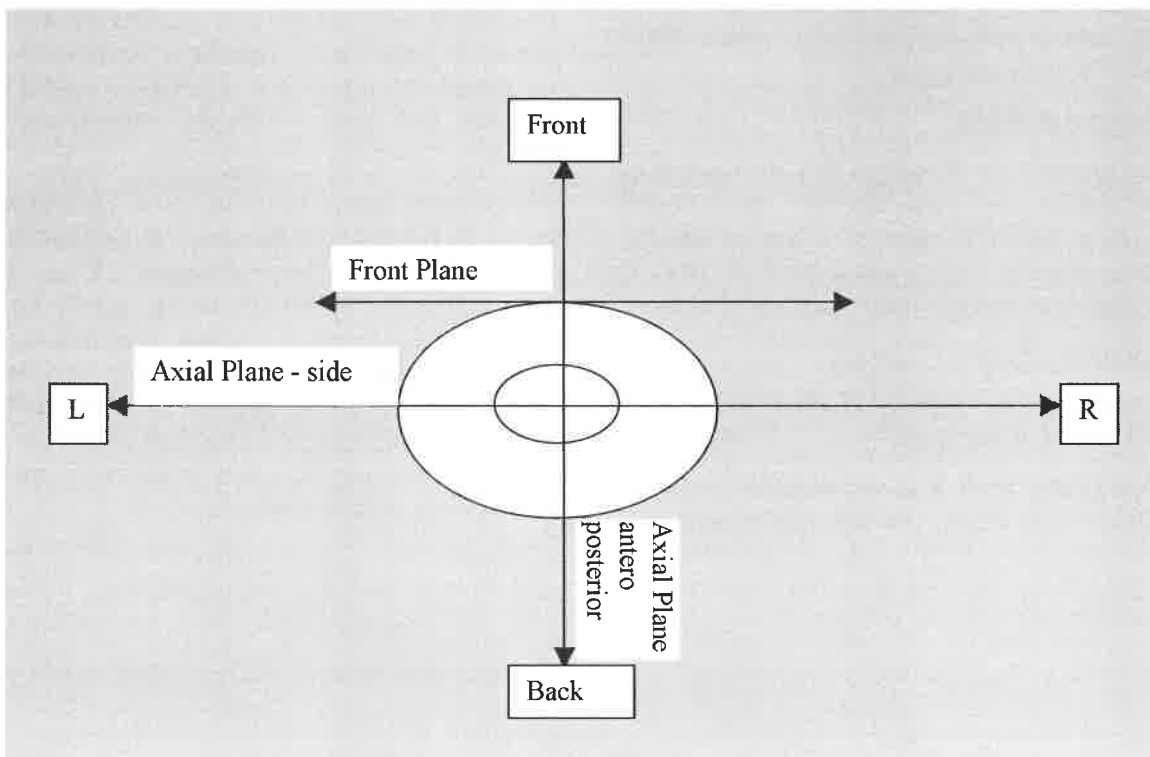
Further, it is interesting to think about the breath and more particularly about the possible role of the diaphragm in the development of the internal spiral. Indeed, the dome of the diaphragm is slightly subsided in its center and the lateral domes have a slight asymmetry: on the one hand rhythmic in the movement of inhalation, and on the other hand in the amplitude of the movement because the right dome rises slightly more than the left; it is also intriguing to note that the insertion of the posterior fibers of the diaphragm to the lumbar vertebrae do not occur at the same level: the right crus or pillar reaches to the third

lumbar vertebra, while the left pillar only reaches to the second lumbar vertebra.

### RETURN TO THE FORM

Finally we must question or re-question our practice, obliging us to always respect what was learned above: it is easy to notice that we have a number of faults but that scrupulous respect for the principle of maintaining body unity in the spiral will bring about corrections in our practice.

Then "GOOD PRACTICE"!



# Basic Exercise: Bending From the Waist to the Side

By Zouzou Vallotton and Nicole Henriod

Translated by Don Klein

This exercise is difficult for many of us and for even more of our students.

Yet it is the first of the basic exercises prescribed by Wang Laoshi and doubtless has great importance as it is placed at the beginning of all of the exercises.

Identification of problems:

- It can cause pain in the hips
- It can create tension in the lower back:
  - that torques the knees
  - that torques the ankles
- Evident problems for some
- Many persons (even advanced) do not like this exercise. Those that have no difficulties like this exercise and they are disappointed if it is not performed.
- Some no longer do it by straightening on the side but take the option of straightening facing forward.

What we have heard, read and understood from various sources:

- Volume I of Laoshi: straighten both legs; turn the hips and waist to the side. Bend from the waist without folding legs. Let the head hang and look back. Let the hands hang on both sides of the foot, fingertips touching the ground. Straighten the trunk and slowly lift the head looking in the direction of the navel. Turn the body to the front. At the same time sit halfway down. (No description of weight!)
- Claudy Jeanmougin: the spine has to be brought in tension by complete turning to the side before bending so that vertebrae can bend correctly (physiologically) and keep the pelvis and shoulders rotated to the side while straightening, without any return to the front so there is no shear force on the vertebrae. (*AWYMTA Journal*, Fall 1996, p. 23.)

This exercise can be dangerous if badly executed, but is excellent if done correctly.

- Christian Bernapel's book on the Thirteen Postures: pay attention to not force the rotation of the waist. Keep the thighs relaxed.
- Last *Bulletin*, Laoshi in answer to the question about the weight of the body: the weight of the body must be on the leg opposite the side towards which one turns (*Bulletin du YangjiaMichuan Taiji Quan*, No. 41, Novembre 2002.)
- Henri Mouthon: At the bottom—hold the heel and the ball of the foot to stick the foot on the ground.

What we have heard from various sources as modifications:

- As the pelvis and trunk turn to the side, allow the front of the opposite foot to gently and effortlessly turn inward.
- Turn the pelvis to the side, shift weight to the leg opposite the side to which one turns, allow the leg to fold while bending.

We ask you to try the following:

1. Bend very slowly, with eyes closed, weight on the rear leg, observing on your own what happens to the back, the hip, the feet, the weight, etc.  
Then with a second person observing what occurs, repeat.
2. Bend very slowly, with eyes closed, weight equally on both legs, observing on your own what happens to the back, the hip, the feet, the weight, etc.  
Then with a second person observing what occurs, repeat.

Our propositions:

We never do this as the first exercise.

We propose preparatory exercises to be done before doing this exercise:

1. Arm swings, thumbs of hands in touch with thighs, palms facing rear. Relax and settle the pelvis, let legs bend. Raise the pelvis and legs, stretch to the top of the head (5 times).  
The same—arms accompany movement to shoulder height: in raising the pelvis the arms rise (5 times).
2. Carry the Tiger to the Mountain (5 times).
3. Turn waist left then right, stretching until the summit of the head, by keeping the soles of the feet in touch with the ground (heel, ball, two edges):  
Stretch the arm opposite the direction rotation in supination above the head (palm faces upward).  
Push the sky with the hand opposite the rotation; press the ground with the other hand.  
Bring the hand on the side of rotation to the level of the forehead with palm turned forward and to push to the cardinal with the opposite hand.  
These exercises help make a connection between the top of the head and the soles of feet, with the central axis, provide a “body” benchmark (the limits on the side to which one turns), and soften the pelvis and waist.
4. To bend on the side by keeping two legs straight (tense and relaxed) the soles of the feet on the ground, hands on each side of the foot.

## PRINCIPLES RELATED TO THE EXPRESSION OF THE MOVEMENT IN TAIJIQUAN

*Workshop proposed at the gathering of the Amicale 2002 and sketched out in the company of Claudy Jeanmougin at the meeting of the Teachers College in March 2003 on the theme "front leg, rear leg."*

*By Christian Bernapel*

*Translated by Tomas Ries*

All agree that "all movements<sup>1</sup> are directed by Yi." However views diverge as to the origins of movement itself. Becoming conscious of the origin of movement is of great use if one is to practice correctly, respecting the foundations of taijiquan.

The classic text attributed to Zhang Sanfeng specifies: "Root *jin* (internal power) in the foot, propel it upwards through the leg, control it by the waist, and manifest it through the fingers."

In all its simplicity, the above provides a precise description of the successive stages that permit the manifestation of the conscious gesture.

Yangjia Michuan distinguishes itself from most other schools through a rare particularity—when we practice the form or tuishou, our movements express themselves spherically of the body.<sup>2</sup> This paradox leads teachers and students alike to various interpretations as to the origin of the movement underlying each specific move.

The text by Zhang Sanfeng is particularly pertinent in helping us towards a better understanding of the origins of movement—of the base that permits the expression of the move. My proposal for discussion rests on the clarifications provided by the first two basic tuishou exercises of our school, and specifically on their evasive and pushing aspects. I should emphasize that on this occasion I do not deal with the fundamental role of the breath, which at every moment supports the supple and firm flow of movement. I will simply note that in the practice of taijiquan the body closes on the inhale and opens on the exhale, whereas the process is inverted in neigong.

The movement projecting the upper members (arms, forearms and hands) outwards from oneself (expression) or withdrawing them inwards towards oneself (absorbing) is generated by the ascending and descending spiral and crossing movements generated or absorbed by the foundation resting on the ground (foot, leg), and conducted by the tilting of the pelvis (anteversion or retroversion) and the undulating transmission of the backbone towards the axis of the shoulders. Thus the horizontal action originates in the vertical management of the forces of gravity: the upright posture that makes us "human."

The overall coordination of the spiraling rotations is carried out thanks to the pelvic and scapular belts, which act either as source or as receptors as the case may be (solitary practice or dual practice).

Thus the forward and rear legs are closely linked, and one cannot speak of one without the other. Each leg acts as either

a pillar or a brace. The pillar is the leg upon which one rests one's weight while rising or descending, and it can be either the front or rear leg. The brace is the leg that supports the pillar, the front leg bracing when the rear leg is the pillar, and the rear leg acting as an anchor when the front leg is the pillar.

In addition, the way in which each foot rests its weight on the ground is delicate and fine. Heel, arch, ball of the foot—each play a specific role. From the heel to the tip of the foot, and whether stationary or moving, their foundation on the ground follows precise rules. Thus the heel corresponds to the rear leg, the ball of the foot to the front leg and the arch of the foot to the pelvic floor.

Everyone is no doubt aware of the movements in the shape of an 8 acting on the movements of the form under our feet—between the forward and rear leg, between the two hips and between the two shoulders as well in the vertical crossing movements between the left and right sides of our body, and of course in the undulating movement of the backbone.

Initiating a movement requires an origin, a foundation. An astronaut needs to be propelled, to be pushed from a base in order to float in emptiness. Exactly the same applies to the vertical evolution of the taiji when the movements—when practiced alone—originate from the base provided by the ground. Each gesture is part of a greater movement that in turn has its source in the alternating shifts of weight against the ground, ascending or descending to generate the rotation of the body. This does not apply to practice with a partner where the support of the ground is complemented by the actions of the partner.

Thus, action determines the use of the foundation on which one "rests," like a leg on the pedal of a bicycle that generates an ascending movement (yang action) or which "absorbs," like a suspension to conduct the descending movement (yin action).

In all cases, using the ground as the foundation requires the controlled relaxation of the pelvic area and waist—whether it be while rising or while descending. In fact, the action of the pelvis modifies the nature of the support from the ground. One can thus conclude that the pelvis and legs are intimately linked in finding the support of the ground!

The successive stages that govern the development of the conscious move thus would be: the intention of the move, the foundation on the ground, the action of the legs, the steering by the waist, the transmission by the backbone, the reception in the shoulders and, finally, the manifestation of the move in the hands. The reader may imagine for him or herself the successive stages involved in the case of absorbing, whether in solitary practice or as a pair.

## Practical Examples

### I. Resting on the ground: rising and descending force.

*Application of the two first basic exercises: evasive aspect.*

**Rising force:** first basic exercise.

The starting position is “sitting” on the rear leg.

1. The rear leg rests upon (pushes against) the ground. Spiraling upwards movement. The shoulder on the same side as the supporting leg becomes void due to the rotation of the waist and shoulders.
2. The rear leg relaxes its push on the ground. Spiraling descending movement. The body reassumes its original position.

**Descending force:** second basic exercise.

The starting position is “upright” on the rear leg.

1. The rear leg relaxes its push on the ground. Spiraling descending movement. The shoulder opposite the leg effaces itself due to the rotation of the waist and the shoulders.
2. The rear leg pushes against the ground. Rising spiraling movement.

The body reassumes its normal position.

*Strike the flanks to the right and left.*

A combination of the first two exercises in which they mutually generate each other.

**Test:** Identify the complementarity of the movement for a clearer sense of the shift in support on the ground.

**Commentary:** riding on a bicycle is the perfect illustration of the alternation of yin and yang. Pushing on the pedal straightens the body. Arriving at the bottom the body relaxes on that side in order to initiate the same movement on the other side.

**Test:** Identify the complementarity of the movement of the leg located on the side of the rising pedal.

### II. Crossing the circle: the pillar and the buttress.

The left leg is the source of the action of the right hand and reciprocally.

**Preliminary exercise.**

*Shift the weight between the front and rear leg.*

Alternating the pillar and buttress.

- a. Impulsion of the movement forwards by pressing against the heel of the rear leg and straightening the pillar of the rear leg.

- b. Absorbing the movement on the ball of the front foot and buttressing with the front leg.
- c. Returning the movement towards the rear by straightening the pillar of the front leg.
- d. Receiving the movement on the arch and heel of the rear foot.
- e. Restart at a.

*Application of the first to basic exercises: pushing aspect.*

**The push in the first basic exercise.**

The rear leg is the pillar, the front leg braces and stabilizes the rear leg.

The body no longer turns as in “evading”: the front brace assumes its full importance.

The hand of the forward leg is nourished by the pillar of the rear leg: the circle is crossed.

**The push in the second basic exercise.**

The forward leg becomes the pillar, the rear leg anchors it and stabilizes the front leg.

The hand of the rear leg is nourished by the pillar of the front leg.

**Illustration:** using *an*, identify the source of the push for each hand. Push with both hands, then only push with one hand, alternating between front and rear hands: identify the origin of the push.

**Commentary on the apparent exceptions:** *cai* requires that the opposite knee is raised as a source.

### III. Applying these principles simultaneously.

Find how the movements of the form flow into one another while rigorously respecting the alternating rising and descending flow.

Identify the principles in the basic exercises, their corresponding pushes and the evolution of the form. Finally, working as pairs: push and absorb.

Understand the transfers from the rear leg to the front leg and vice versa.

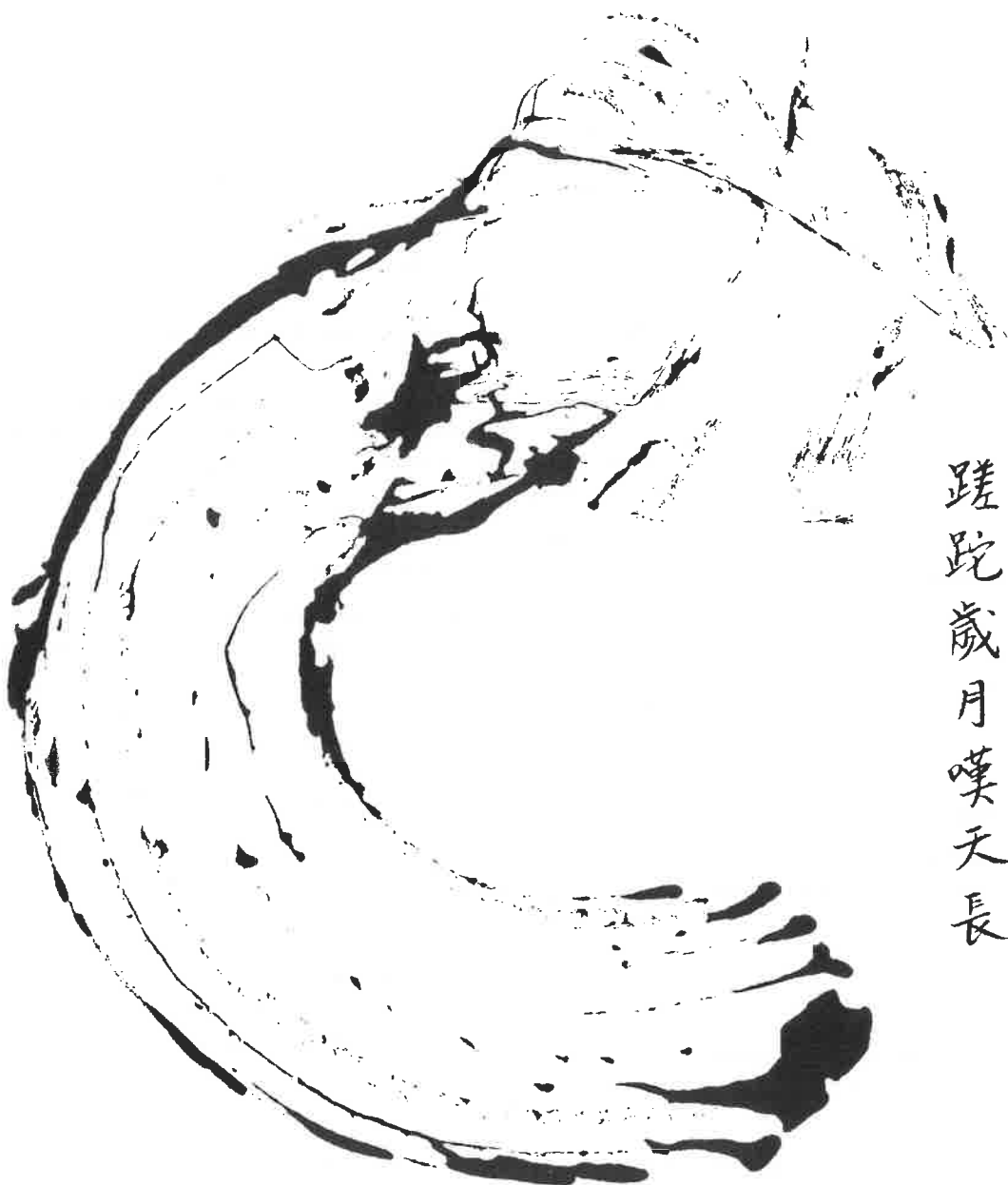
**Definitions.**

**Movement:** the change of position in space as a function of time. Displacement, trajectory...

**Gesture:** deliberate or involuntary movement of the body seeking to express or accomplish something.

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: Two key terms have no direct counterparts in English. *Geste*. A literal translation is “gesture,” but this has a different connotation in English, far more vague and theatrical than the French notion of *geste*. A precise translation might be “hand movement,” however this is clumsy. Dictionaries translate *geste* as “movement” but again this is both too vague and causes problems in phrases such as “le mouvement a l'origine du geste,” which would then be translated as “the movement at the origin of the movement,” although it has a nice Daoist ring to it. So *geste* is translated as “movement” in some cases, “gesture” in others and “application” or “arm technique” in others. *Appui*. Literally, support, placing the weight upon, lean, rest upon, etc. In some cases—but only some—could be translated as either “rooting” or “grounding”; however “rooting” and “grounding” have different connotations from “rest the weight upon,” and in some cases it is clear that neither applies since there is a French term for rooting—*enracinement*. The result is a slightly clumsier English rendering of the phrases involving *appui*.

<sup>2</sup> Translators note: This would seem to refer to the principle of “Luoxuan Jin”—cf p. 492 of Wang Yen-nien's *Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan*, Volume 2.



感想

孤芳自賞命清高  
閑讀詩書力求強  
賞詩難覓五斗米  
蹉跎歲月嘆天長

*Ann Lee*



## 感想

## Gǎnxiǎng

孤芳自賞命清高	gūfāng zìǎnshǎng mìng qīnggāo
閑讀詩書力求強	xián dú shīshū lìqiú qiáng
賞詩難覓五斗米	shǎng shī nán mì wǔdǒumǐ
蹉跎歲月嘆天長	cuōtuó suìyuè tàn tiāncháng

Editor:

Again Ann has asked that I try a translation of her poem. This one is composed of four lines of seven syllables each. In addition to the problems of maintaining the syllabic count, this piece illustrates the difficulties of translating idioms. The obstacle of presenting as many of the overtones as possible is made more difficult by the cultural differences between Chinese and American concepts of idiom. As Adeline Yen Mah notes, to her “Chinese mind” proverbs and metaphors “are synonymous. . . . The Chinese language is full of metaphors. That is how we Chinese think, by metaphors. . . . Because written Chinese is a pictorial, and not a phonetic, language, the characters denoting abstract qualities were initially derived metaphorically from word-pictures representing concrete objects. For example, the word *dao* means ‘road’ or ‘path,’ but it also means ‘way,’ ‘method,’ or ‘doctrine.’ Thus when I see the Chinese word *dao*, it suggests to my mind a whole panorama of related images, and the whole effect is rather like reading poetry. . . . A natural consequence of this type of thinking is the Chinese tendency to use proverbs, and the history behind these proverbs also, as metaphors or concrete examples to illustrate abstract ideas.” (*A Thousand Pieces of Gold: A Memoir of China’s Past Through Its Proverbs*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2002, p. 65.) While Shakespeare or Marlowe could call up scores of images to a 16<sup>th</sup> century tradesman with a few words, unfortunately Americans have virtually no sense of history, and certainly not for such multilayered historical usage. Leaving aside James Joyce, we still wonder who was Peter Quince, and what does a Clavier have to do with the Old Testament apocryphal story of Susanna?

So, Gūfāng zìshǎng means “indulge in self-admiration,” where Gūfāng (lonely fragrance?) is “narcissistic”; zì is “self,” and shǎng, “admiration”; I try to introduce the concept of gū, isolated or alone. Nán mì wǔdǒumǐ can be glossed as “hard to make a living,” but is literally “difficult to find five dippers (50 liters) of rice.” I approximate this with the various images of the “pot ringing empty”: food, alms, hollow – as well as the contrary English idiom “my pot/bowl/cup is full.” Cuōtuó suìyuè is an idiom for “idle away time”; cuōtuó by itself means “slip and fall, miss a chance; waste time”: note the character for “foot” 足 in both cuō and tuó (the other half of each character is phonetic) and, interestingly, suì (years old) contains 步 “step” as a component. The characters tàn (sigh) and tiān may suggest a contrast between man and heaven, and tàn is a cognate of nán (difficult) in the previous line.

### Reflections

**Self-absorbed and tucked away  
Idle study, stubborn striving  
The poet’s pot rings empty  
While life is short, heaven lasts**

# A Martial Art Philosopher?

By Bede Bidlack

Delivered at Great River Taoist Center 14 July 2001

When one mentions taijiquan, the image that often comes to mind is either that of choreographed dancing that is “spiritual,” or that of a martial art, a category many people define as the practice of learning how to hurt people. Sadly, this is so because those teaching taiji often teach it merely as “choreographed dancing that is ‘spiritual,’” whatever that means. Likewise, people think of martial arts as the theory and method of hurting people because martial arts are often taught that way. As far as martial arts being art, one look at any tournament will assure one that there is nothing that resembles art to be found there. Thus, taijiquan and martial arts have an image problem, and it’s their own fault.

So it is with art and philosophy. Art is too often concerned with productivity and catering to consumerism. This leads it so far astray from its essence that people do not know how to respond to a painting or a piece of music except insofar as it is a commodity. Philosophy is now in the big business of university education. There it is safely tucked away to the realm of the academics where it is discussed by those far more learned than those who are on the outside (i.e., those who do not have certain vowels and consonants after their names and therefore cannot think...so say the academics).

The following will attempt, in part, to demonstrate that martial arts, in fact, have more to do with nonviolence; art is more about transformation; and philosophy, as Seneca puts it, “teaches us how to act, not how to talk.”<sup>1</sup> However, what is really being attempted is to demonstrate that the three are interconnected and have everything to do with each other, such that the appellation, “martial-art philosopher,” makes perfect sense.

In a physical confrontation with one or even several unarmed attackers, many martial arts that exist today are effective. If they were not, I do not believe that they would have survived the test of time. Even the styles that are taught more as a sport than a martial art were at one time effective means of self-defense. Taijiquan in particular is extremely effective because it can meet an opponent at any distance. Kicks and stepping can close the gap between the practitioner and his opponent; certain techniques like “fair lady works shuttles” is good for close distance; but most of taiji is exercised at a mid-distance, which is advantageous because mid-distance is where most initial contacts take place. Furthermore, the soft style of taiji allows for one to redirect forces away from oneself that are much greater than one could deflect or block by using muscular strength. Using qi, one’s internal energy, gives the strikes of taiji a force that goes beyond what one could accomplish even with diligent weight training. Finally, unlike hard styles, taiji allows the practitioner to get better with age long after the hard stylist hits his limit due to an aging body.

However, in today’s America, it is quite unlikely that one would have to defend oneself against an unarmed attacker. Most violent crimes involve a weapon of some sort. A martial artist of

some skill could defend himself from hand held-weapons, such as a knife or a club, enough to escape the situation. However, many criminals carry firearms. Are martial arts, most of which were developed before the age of the gun, no longer martial because they cannot defend against guns? It should be noted that because a more powerful method of attack is developed, the previous method should still be considered martial. A knife can still kill even though guns have been around for centuries. Likewise, a solid punch to the throat can kill and is therefore martial. Both armed and unarmed methods can be considered martial, but if one studies a martial art in order to learn how to beat or to hurt people, one would be better off purchasing a gun, rather than investing a great deal of time or money into years of training.

Despite what has just been said, people today do study martial arts for self-defense purposes, and this is not misguided. The martial gain of martial arts is not how to best an opponent physically, but how not to get into a physical conflict at all. As Ueshiba, the founder of aikido said: “We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it.”<sup>2</sup> This is done by the skill of perception gained by the study of martial arts. In taiji one is taught to focus the mind again and again, to reduce distractions. Thus, without distractions, one is able to perceive more closely what one is being attentive to. On a very practical level, one learns to perceive one’s environment in such a way as to avoid areas of potential danger. For example, should one find a rough looking group of people approaching along the same side of the street, it is prudent to simply cross to the street rather than to risk confrontation.

People often ask me if I have ever had to use my taijiquan. I answer: “Of course, every time I take a breath or walk through a door.” Inevitably this is met with unsatisfied murmurings, so I relate to them a story that occurred here in Washington, D.C.

While helping some friends with yard work, a man known to be physically intimidating, and on one occasion violent, came onto the property and was being escorted off by the person who found him. The aggressive man was half out of his mind as he walked and yelled at the escort. With a glance from the escort I joined him in the walk off the property. The aggressive man then turned his attention to me saying something like: “What the (expletive) do you think you’re doing?!” I responded in a quiet, but firm voice. He then turned to go back on the property because he said that he had left his bag. Skeptical, I followed him. He had a bag stashed in one of the bushes. He picked up the bag, then turned to me with more challenges and threats. I was able to stand confidently and meet his aggressiveness with peace, not because I felt undeniably that I could take him in a physical conflict, but because I could “read” him. I was standing about 10 feet from him, out of range of any potential blows. Furthermore, he held his bag over his shoulder with his right hand. Unless he was left-handed, he would have to drop the bag before approaching for a strike. This would give me plenty of

time to maneuver to safety. I simply spread my hands to reveal myself in a totally vulnerable position, thereby making it clear that I had no aggressive intentions. He continued yelling as he walked away. Thus, violence was avoided because my martial practice told me that I was safe. Feeling safe I was unafraid.

Everyone has their theory of violence: "It comes from TV and movies," "It is from lack of gun control," and so on. I believe violence stems from fear. We live in a violent culture because we live in a culture that is much afraid. Afraid of physical crimes, to be sure, but also afraid of not having enough, or, more to the point, not having what another has. People are aggressive to get more, because the assumption is that, "If another gets it, I won't. I will be deprived." This fear of material deprivation easily rolls over into other areas of life and often leads to violence. It is amazing to me that, with all of our affluence and so called developed civilization, that people get shot for not using their turn signal to change lanes—the phenomenon of "road rage."<sup>3</sup>

Even this is a very limited view of violence. People who criticize martial arts as violent restrict themselves to this limited view of violence as a physical attack on another. However, each of us engages in violence everyday, from the violence of eating—taking a living organism and assimilating it to our bodies—to swatting insects. There is also the violence we do to the earth through pollution and commercial agriculture that indiscriminately sprays herbicides and pesticides. (If you purchase the products of this agriculture, then you are a part of this violence.) There is the violence that we do to each other in the form of racism, sexism, lust and gossip. Perhaps the most insidious violence is that which we do to ourselves, as the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton once wrote:

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence....: overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many people and projects, to want to help everyone and everything is to succumb to violence.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of all of this how is one to avoid violence? One answer can be found in the self-control developed in martial arts training that fortifies one to resist temptations towards violence and nurtures inner strength. As Gandhi used to say: "It is easy for the strong person to be nonviolent. It is the weakling who finds it impossible."<sup>5</sup> People who criticize martial training as being merely an exercise in violence should keep this in mind.

The problem is that Americans do not think of martial training as a discipline today. Rather, it is merely looked upon as a sport useful for keeping in shape or for entertainment. This is why I try to emphasize that taijiquan is a discipline such as training in the arts.

As I look back on my experience of taijiquan training, it seems to me to have progressed much in the same way an artist might progress in his or her training in such things as painting, dancing or playing an instrument. Initially, there is much attention given to simple techniques: correct posture in the case of taiji, correct method of holding a brush or drawing a straight line in the case

of painting. Practice of these techniques follows strict rules, and the repetition of training the same movement over and over can be quite difficult and tedious, much like a pianist might find playing the scales over and over difficult and tedious, at first.

Then, over time, the deliberate cognitive practice of thinking when and where to move or thinking about how to move, draw, play or dance, gives way to the intuitive, the non-thinking method of performing an art. For example, I played the saxophone in high school. When I came to a piece of music that I found difficult, I played it very slowly over and over. Gradually, I increased the speed with which I played it until I played it at the correct tempo. Often times this would result in my fingers "memorizing" the positions for the notes. When I reached the difficult part of the music, I was not thinking about the notes or the music, my fingers just played it. Likewise with taiji training. The slow movements of form training allow one to catch mistakes that would otherwise be missed if one were moving faster. The beginner thinks about where to put his or her hands and feet as well as when to do so for any given movement. Over time, the body "memorizes" the movements such that there is no more "thinking about." The next level of training increases the tempo and brings this experience to free hand practice, which is often full-speed sparring. One does not have time to think about the movements, they must come automatically. Perhaps this is what Ueshiba was talking about when he said that the study of martial arts is about forgetting.

He could have also meant forgetting oneself. Taijiquan is not an art for self-expression. It is about forgetting the self and surrendering oneself. In this realm, there is no "I and thou." One becomes totally identified with one's opponent. This is where the Chinese language really helps. In Chinese, one's opponent is not literally referred to as "opponent." "Opponent" is suggestive of otherness and conflict, neither of which is an idea nurtured in taiji. Rather, the person facing the practitioner is called the 對方 *duifāng*, which literally means "opposite." The image is that of one's reflection in a mirror. I like this for a number of reasons. It does away with the concept of otherness; it suggests that one cannot do violence to another without doing violence to oneself; and, similarly, so often the aggressiveness one detects from the *duifāng* is really a reflection of the aggressiveness hidden inside oneself. The *duifāng* serves as a catalyst for reflecting back to the practitioner the negative emotions or tendencies of the ego bottled up inside the practitioner. This is how one learns about one's ego and its negative effects. So taiji is not about self-expression because this often means ego expression, which is precisely what one is trying to diminish in one's practice.

With the ego diminished, one then becomes more able to perceive, to be attentive to that which surrounds one. It is a way to pure perception. In her book, *Drawing From the Right Side of the Brain*, Betty Edwards states that drawing consists of only five things:

1. Perception of edges
2. Perception of spaces
3. Perception of relationships
4. Perception of lights and shadows
5. Perception of the whole<sup>6</sup>

In other words, drawing is as easy as perception, perception, perception, perception, perception. Remember the story about the crazy man mentioned earlier? Taiji was practiced in a martial situation by the use of perception that enabled me to act so as to avoid conflict. The perception was not a cognitive process; I just did it. Acting on that perception was a cognitive process, a left side of the brain process.

The left side of the brain is responsible for cognition and analytical thinking—"thinking about." The right side of the brain is more involved with perception and intuition. Betty Edwards explains that insofar as one thinks—naming, categorizing and so forth—when one draws, one cannot draw. The brain is thinking analytically when it must be operating perceptively, spatially. It requires a shift to the right side of the brain. Unfortunately in our overly rational education and society, this does not come easily to most people. The shift must be deliberate and practiced.

In the early stages of my taiji practice, I used the same approach to learning as I had to academic learning. This led to anguish. The reason being was that I was using the wrong tool for the job. My left brain had difficulty with the task presented to it: "memorizing" the form with my body. The left brain had to get out of the way, but it fought to hold on, to stay in control. It wanted to control even a task that it was unable to do. Finally, it gave up, and my practice improved dramatically. All of this is a more scientific way of saying what I said before. I had to "forget" where to put my hands and my feet and just do it. Of course, I really haven't forgotten. I am just using the nonverbal side of my brain, the right side. Conversely, when I am teaching, students often ask me about how to move my body or at what angle. This is very difficult, because then I have to name what I had previously unnamed. I have to go from a right-brain task to a left-brain task. In the moment of teaching, it is not unusual for me to have to get back to the student after I have more time to work out this dialogue between the two halves of my brain.

Thus, in both theory and method, I find taijiquan to be an art form, but does taiji have anything in common with philosophy? It has very little to do with modern philosophy because the modern philosophers do not see anything like a cosmic nature or first principle beyond themselves. Hence there is no transcendence in their philosophy. (The significance of this will become clearer.) On the other hand, the ancient Greek philosophers did. The ancient philosopher was occupied with explaining the apparent universality of the world as well as its apparent diversity. He looked towards a governing first principle, the one thing that would explain it all. The earliest of these, of whom we have a record, was Thales in the sixth century B.C.E, who said that everything was water. The various answers the ancient philosophers proposed had the running theme that things were not as they appeared, there was something beyond the senses, which were not to be trusted. The philosopher aimed at transcending the realm of the senses to the life of the objective spirit so as to place himself within the perspective of this "something beyond," which could collectively be called the cosmos. He did this through exercises that are often regarded as intellectual exercises, but insofar as they are interested in transcendence, they are, in fact, spiritual exercises.<sup>7</sup> To learn these exercises, the aspirant would go to a school of philosophy and learn at the feet of a qualified teacher. A look at one

particular school would be helpful in understanding the exercises of the philosophers as spiritual.

The Platonic school is like the other schools of ancient Greece (e.g., Stoic, Epicurean) in that it demands one to turn away from the senses through disciplining the body. One is to be moderate in food and drink and in the pursuit of material needs. But what is most characteristic of Platonism is the Socratic dialogue where one reads of the figure of Socrates having a conversation with one whom Socrates is attempting to "wake up" to the larger reality of the cosmos. In them, Socrates does not attempt to teach, nor is it the aim of his interlocutor to learn. Rather, the aim is for the interlocutor to question himself, to turn inward, and for the dialectician to guide him on this journey.<sup>9</sup> One need not rely solely on a teacher to lead one through the dialectic; the practitioner is expected to continue the dialogue with himself. This is commonly referred to as meditation. Socrates was such a master of this exercise that he could be in a trance for hours on end, such as in the Symposium when he was late for a banquet because of being delayed in meditation.<sup>8</sup>

So it is with taijiquan. Again, much like the artist, the martial artist and the philosopher seek out a teacher who can guide them on the path to transformation. Learning exercises from the teacher, the practitioner is led to the inner world and thereby sees—perceives—the outer world differently, as it really is. It is a process from the senses back to the senses-transformed. It begins with the intellect, which is transformed by the exercise of meditation, to an intellectual/intuitive perception of the world and the practitioner's place in it. This is what is meant by transcendence.

One should also note that one never achieves "sage hood" in philosophy. Socrates himself was constantly engaged in these meditations. Philosophy is derived from the Greek *philos*, love, and *sophos*, wisdom—love of wisdom. It is a love of wisdom, and, being love, it never reaches an end. It is an ongoing love affair. Likewise, mastery in the martial arts is not a state or title to be achieved. Mastery is an ongoing process. Wang Yen-nien, is called master in the art of taijiquan, yet he continues to practice and to learn from that practice. Thus, it is not unusual to hear two different students who learned from Master Wang at two different periods having learned two different ways of executing the same movement. Martial arts, like philosophy is an ongoing process that transforms the very being of the individual and how that individual perceives the world and his/her place in it.

To come full circle, philosophy, like martial arts, prepares one for nonviolence. To turn away from the senses as one does in transcendent realm of thought is to turn away from the vehicle of the senses—the body. As it was mentioned earlier, all of the Greek schools encouraged the disciplining of the body so as to overcome the passions that assault the inner world and disturb the peace of the individual. For the Platonic school, to encounter the peace and stability of the inner world of thought is to give less regard to the body and its well-being. A spiritual exercise of the Platonists is to meditate on death:

For Plato, training for death is a spiritual exercise that consists in changing one's point of view. We are to change from a vision of things dominated by individual passions to a representation of the world governed by the

universality and objectivity of thought. This constitutes a conversion...brought about with the totality of the soul.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, one prepares for the separation of the soul from the body and thereby fears death less, fears being in want less, fears less. By mastering one's fears through the method of philosophy one is less likely to relieve oneself by violence and anger, just like one does through the method of martial arts.

This fearlessness is most starkly illustrated by the death of Socrates. Rather than sacrificing virtue or truth, Socrates sacrificed his body. "This is nothing other than the philosophical choice."<sup>11</sup> Why was Socrates put to death? Because he challenged illusion, what could be collectively called "the world." When the world sees its own illusoriness, it responds violently to the person or group of people who reveal it for what it is. So the world responds to that one with hemlock, or crucifixion, or a bullet on a Memphis morning.

So be admonished: to be a martial artist, an artist, a philosopher or a martial arts philosopher is a very dangerous undertaking. To learn to see the world as it really is, to perceive it without its illusions, is to be compelled to respond to that illusion, that untruth. Sincere contemplation through taiji, art or philosophy draws one to a more authentic existence. One sees past the veneer of the world to more substantial things. This can change one's life and the lives of those who live and work around one. One may not hold as important what others hold to be important. They will not like this and may respond violently through ridicule or even physical violence. It is up to the martial artist, the artist, the philosopher to nurture courage so as to respond not with violence, but with patience and love. In this way, the heart of those entrapped in illusion will soften and be set free, and the world will be transformed, one person at a time. Yes, martial art philosophers do exist, but there are far too few of them.

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Letters*, 20, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Dobson, "A Soft Answer," in *The Overlook Martial Arts Reader: Classic Writings on Philosophy and Technique*, ed. Randy F. Nelson (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Last year 17 percent of adults fell asleep at the wheel according to the National Sleep Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> Mohandas Gandhi as quoted in *Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation*, by Eknath Easwaran, (U.S.A.: Nilgiri Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Betty Edwards, *Drawing from the Right Side of the Brain: A Course in Enhancing Creativity and Artistic Confidence*, Revised Ed., (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1989), xii.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, U.S.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 82.

<sup>8</sup> Hadot, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Hadot, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Hadot, 94.

<sup>11</sup> Hadot, 94.

## Blocks In Learning YMT

(Continued from Last Issue's "Ask the Advisers")

By Christian Bernapel

Translated by Don Klein

Areas of blockage of progress are as much the teacher's as the student's. Among the possible causes are pedagogies, psychological profiles, different morphologies. The teacher's pedagogy is the direct reflection of his or her being, of his/her qualities, his/her limits and his/her own difficulties. Often, these qualities or these limits are passed on from teacher to student. But who is the teacher and who is the student?

This militates in favor of the College: so many teachers, so many students. They mix and exchange their expectations, their educations. The multiplicity of pedagogies, psychological profiles, morphologies, interpretations allow each to find there his or her own account: listen, compare, reflect, try out.

Nevertheless, one good teacher remains indispensable to awaken consciousness.

If I were a student, I would choose my teacher with the greatest care. I shall make sure that his/her pedagogy and its presence are appropriate and convenient for me. Then, I would listen with attention and passion, learning by copying, without thinking by relying on him/her. I begin even feeling his/her sensations in me, listening to them, allowing them to appear to be my own. If this teacher respects my freedom, in the faith I granted him/her, while also giving me friendly support, I shall be able to discover and develop my own appropriate qualities and better identify my limits. The material that s/he will have given me will be able to become a real tool of transformation and evolution of which I am the master. Then, I shall take the road to meet other teachers and my practice brothers and sisters who will illuminate those facets that have remained dark to me.

Let us return to the universal foundation texts of taijiquan:

粘連黏隨不丟頂 Zhān lián nián suí bù diū dǐng

*Adhere bind stick follow without losing contact.*

These are points to loosen if they were tied up.

And then let us meditate on the Song of Thirteen Movements:

入門引路須口授。功夫無息法自修。  
若言體用何為準。意氣君來骨肉臣。  
想推用意終何在。益壽延年不老春。  
歌兮歌兮百四十。字字真切意無遺

Rùmén yǐnlù xū kǒushòu  
Ruòyán tǐyòng hé wèi zhǔn  
Xiǎng tuī yòngyì zhōng hézài  
Gē xī gē xī bǎi sishí

Gōngfū wúxī fǎ zìxiū  
Yìqì jūn lái gǔròu chén  
Yìshòu yánnián bù lǎo chūn  
Zìzì zhēnqiè yì wúyí

*To enter the door and be shown the way, you must be orally taught.  
Practice should be uninterrupted, and technique achieved by self-study.  
Speaking of the body and its function, what is the standard?  
The I and Qi are king, and the bones and muscles are the court.  
Think over carefully what the final purpose is: to lengthen life and maintain youth.  
The Song consists of 140 characters; each character is true and the meaning is complete.*

What more is there to say?

Well then! Sing now!

# PHOTO ALBUM

## Baja California Wudang Jian Workshop, N.Y.C. Taijiquan Day Demonstration, Houston Demonstration



### Photo Credits

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Charlotte Ehrman  
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## Question Asked of All Members, Advisers, Friends

*"Given so many people from so many different places are now practicing YMT, how do we best proceed to remain connected to one another, nurture one another and be actively supportive of one another's growth. If this intention is not realized, what practices, implied or direct, individual or group, break this intention of nurturing?"*

*Being a newer member of the organization I believe the AYMTA is doing a great job in promoting YMT. The AYMTA Journal along with the resources available through the organization allows one to advance at one's own pace. I find the books and tapes extremely helpful. Thanks for all the help!*

*George Louie*

Besides what we have already set forth - annual meeting, festival, workshops and rencontres—we have encouraged the creation of a pool of documentation, listing all the videos, tape, texts, images possessed by the members with the idea of helping everyone to have a more direct access to what Master Wang has shown in the different ages of his teaching and, furthermore, be able to compose and propose original, pedagogical records in the name of the Amicales (Asia, North America and Europe). Another idea is to build up a committee of readers who could go through the literature of TJQ and offer a summary of how the same concept is understood in different styles by different “masters.” This second idea could be open online. Another job for a committee would be to initiate a reflection on which ideas are leading people into the practice, what is the message carried by TJQ, what is its language and meta-language, on which levers does it press, where does it trigger us? The main idea is to promote exchange and to reflect for further practice together. Teachers are in charge of more clearly identifying their sensibilities and making known the point from which they speak and to where they point in teaching so that students can more clearly choose to who they are going to turn. The Web seems to be the right place for these exchanges.

Jean-Luc Perot.

*“Do the basic exercises, practice the taiji form, and develop our push hands, with diligence.”*

*Susan Hoops*

There is one destructive impulse that must be reined in, or it will lead to a major schism in YMT. This is the impulse to judge people according to whether they practice YMT by a rigid notion of what YMT is: Master Wang's practice in the 1980s. It ignores the fact that every master of YMT, from Yang Luchan forward, over the decades has altered YMT as he saw fit. By implication it says that Master Wang's practice in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—which differed from that in the 1980—was not legitimate and by association, his students' practice from that time was not legitimate. It treats as an outcast anyone who experiments with progress in YMT, regardless of his/her intentions. This could not be farther from nurturing. It could not be farther from Master Wang's own spirit as demonstrated over the

years. Without that spirit, we would have no Thirteen Kinetic Movements or Wudang sword form, or many other innovations.

The irony is that so few people seem to care about the *quality* of practice, only whether it fits a rigid notion that stopped being valid the moment it was defined. Without quality of practice, this frozen picture of Master Wang's form is nothing more than a dusty photograph on the mantel.

Dale Napier

*I feel at this time maybe a format on the Internet where we can connect and where exchange might be helpful.*

*Vivianne Chen*

Proceed with an open heart and mind, allowing one to continually listen, learn, and share with others. Avoid dogmatic, hierarchical attitudes towards YMT, as well as other styles of taiji and martial arts; some of my richest experiences and teachers have been not necessarily just from YMT, but other expressions of movement.

Scott Chaplowe

*I believe in letting individuals develop their own sense of what they have learned. In my 10 years with Laoshi he corrected mistakes but left expression alone. You saw it in the elders back in the early '80s: each gave a unique version of a true teaching. The basics that Laoshi taught are the true measure of our collective success.*

*Ken Leonard*

On Nurturing Another's Practice:

With Patience

giggling fits

“aha” moments (that make you howl)

hissy fits

moments of confusion and/or frustration

qi explosions that need regrouping

to honor individual interpretation and momentary focus

Alyce Kneppel

?#1. How about something like a ymt msn forum?

?#2. Not paying regular or close enough attention to our e-mails.

*Rob Reid*



## . . . And Tomas Ries's response is an article on its own:

I am a solitary Yangjia Michuan practitioner in Finland, so the question is particularly apt in my case!

“How do we remain connected, nurture one another and actively support one another's growth?”

a) Essence: by making sure we respect the Yangjia Michuan tradition—both the spirit and practice—as transmitted by Master Wang. We must place this foremost in our own practice and our relations between each other. Probably the only way to do this is to find and nourish a Daoist spirit. That is to say, to remain humble, loving and gentle, and focus on the essential issue—the practice of Yangjia Michuan taijiquan and its relationship with the universe. We must avoid getting caught up in the negative distractions and digressions of the mundane world - and not least those of our egos. Here I mean everything from bureaucratic regulations related to teaching to tensions between different humans engaged in practice. We have all seen examples of this. If we can step back and disengage from the entanglements it all seems petty and destructive. But it's hard and it is so compelling when we are in their midst. But if we are to remain in touch and mutually supportive, then maintaining a Daoist spirit is surely the most important foundation. But it's also the most difficult. Even from my limited exposure to the Yangjia Michuan community I have observed far too many examples of human rivalry and even conflict. In fact tensions and divisions seem to repeat themselves endlessly. When they do take place between others I don't know if there is much one can do. Or should do. The thing is to avoid letting it take hold of our own spirit. The only way I know of avoiding that is to try to remain humble, loving, and to practice neigong. They help find the Dao, or to remain on the Dao, and then the problems fade. The problems remain around us but one sees a way. People, who are naturally humble and loving, gentle and sensitive, have an advantage there. Some just have it; others need to work on it. And for both neigong is an essential means to open intuitive wisdom. That is really the foundation. If we cannot ground practice on that foundation then no matter how hard we try to keep in touch and keep in tune it will be difficult and our efforts will lead to as many divisions as links. Since I work with security policy I don't have any illusions as to the above being particularly easy to achieve. But I do believe that it is the only way. That's why I gave that answer. But only a few will achieve it. In that vein, I thought that Peter Clifford's story of Master Wang's advice to him was marvelous.

b) Practical aspects: this can be broken into two parts. First—*how do we keep in touch and remain cohesive?* Surely the practical basis for that is to practice together, to meet as much as possible, to exchange, to learn to get to know each other. Ergo we must continue to arrange regional and international workshops. And try to make sure that as many as possible can attend. This can be supported by maintaining the journal, perhaps develop and increase the web and internet contacts.

Second—*How do we maintain the Yangjia Michuan tradition?*

What I fear is that deep divisions among some practitioners will emerge after Master Wang withdraws. I still think that the real key to avoid this is to retain a Daoist spirit, but this is difficult.

One practical measure we could take to help reduce divisions is to try to identify which aspects of the Yangjia Michuan taijiquan tradition are part of its very essence and must be followed, and which parts allow for a more flexible individual interpretation. This should be done by Master Wang if he is willing.

What I mean is the following. We are all different and everyone practices taijiquan, neigong and exercises a little differently. Some are more external, some more internal, some more technical, some more meditative, etc., within certain parameters this is natural and unavoidable because we are all different. It is also part of evolution and adaptation to circumstances. Within limits it is OK. The question is to determine what those limits are. What is the essential core of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan that must be retained, and what are the areas where personal evolution can be allowed?

I think it would be helpful to establish the essential core, since differences in practice and questions about what is “right” and “wrong” will emerge should Master Wang's guiding and unifying presence be withdrawn. At that stage (and already now) small differences in practice can become a problem if they grow and become more significant in the practice. Then they can lead to dissent between practitioners and deviation from the essential teaching.

It would, therefore, be helpful if Master Wang could formulate the key precepts that constitute the essential core of Yangjia Michuan taijiquan: those things that must be involved. He has already done a great deal through his two books on the form and applications. But it is probably important also to try to specify the key elements in the spirit of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan. This might help us later on when we need to find our way and determine (hopefully in a spirit of collaboration) what is the right path to follow—where evolution is acceptable and beneficial, and where it is harmful.

In addition if Master Wang were willing to set down the “essence of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan” then it would constitute a great treasure to the taijiquan community as a whole and the human heritage.

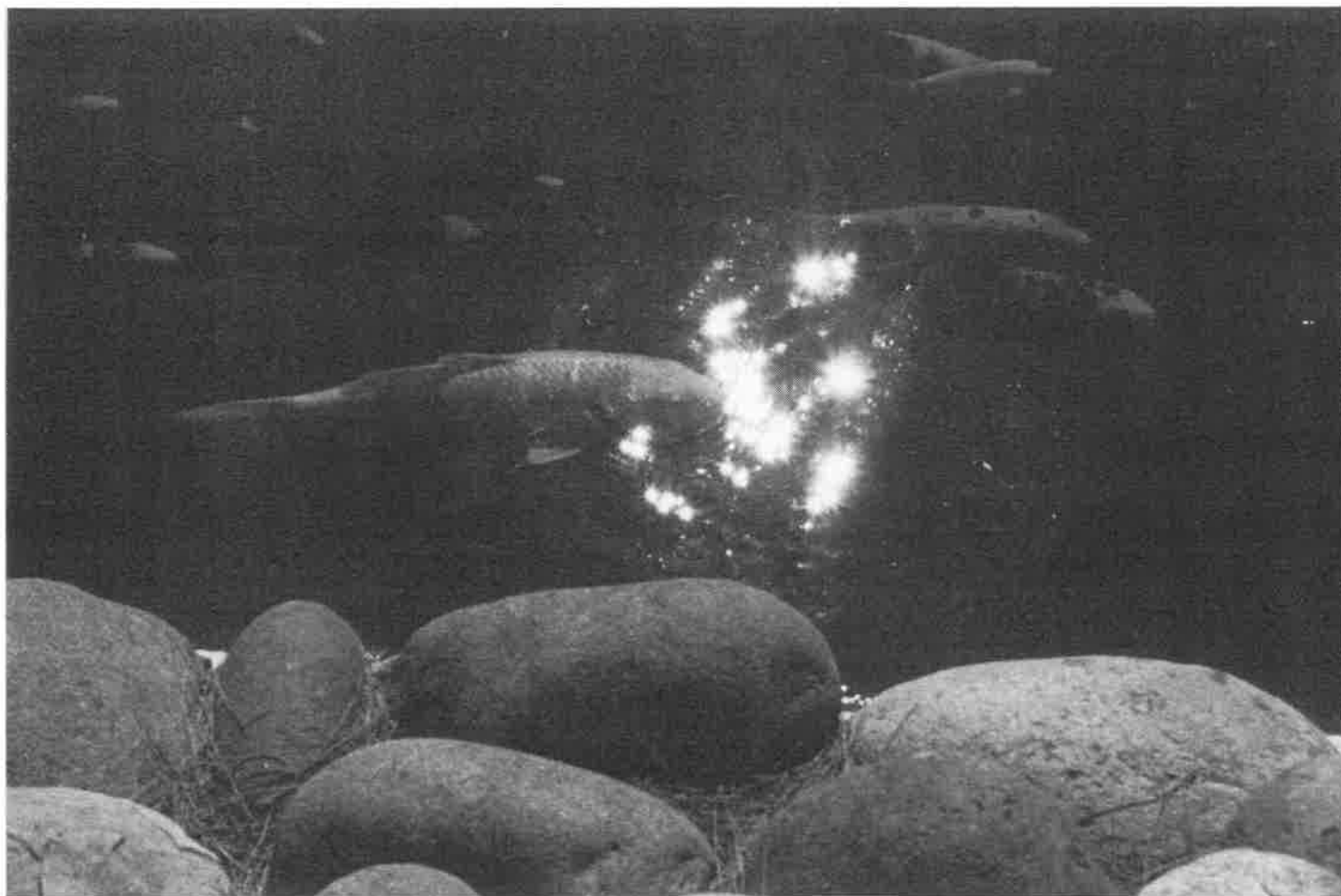
When all this is said however I do realize that perhaps this is not the Daoist way. To specify, to declare, to set down rules and regulations. If they are too rigid then this is not the natural way. Perhaps we will just have to flow, and accept that breakups and branching streams are part of nature. I just cannot forget Master Wang's advice to Peter Clifford—just to practice sincerely - which addresses exactly this issue. Which is another approach to this problem. If we can maintain that sincerity and remain rooted in Daoist spirit then Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan and the community will be OK. If not we can probably not force it. And that would be the other approach to the question, *Wúwéi*, not to force it. However I still think that were Master Wang to formulate the essence of Yangjia Michuan it could help guide the flow a little more harmoniously than were there no formulation. In a sense the formulation is there already, contained in Master Wang's teachings, but as they are now they are open to interpretation.

But in the end no matter what practical measures we take, we will not remain harmonious unless we are rooted in a Daoist spirit. Especially humility, love and focusing on Yangjia Michuan practice and not letting personal ego take over. The ego is our biggest danger, and it is behind almost every case of dissent and disagreement. The more formal arrangements one makes to try to avoid this, the more one may fuel the distractions of the ego. If we can avoid the ego then we can resolve harmoniously the inevitable differences in view that will arise, to the best good of Yangjia Michuan taijiquan. But, some will be able to follow this approach, some will not. And there we are.

As long as Master Wang remains available to us the answer is easy. We follow him and learn from him. The real difficulty will come when he retires. Then this - differing views of what 'correct practice' is—will be the guise in which tensions among practitioners emerge. Divisions over what is right and what is wrong. And yes—there will be "right" and "wrong"—but the really important thing is how we resolve these differences? Do we resolve them together—humbly—or do we let them split us? A little tremor was already apparent in the discussions over "competition" last year. The only way to avoid this danger is internal - through humility, openness and love, and placing

Daoist spirit and Yangjia Michuan practice before ego. Will that happen? For some, yes, for some, no.

Voila, that's in haste from a cold and dark Finland. A lot of opinions and advice which I have not even followed myself, since I could (with a little bit of effort) have taken part in last years meeting in Madison and the meetings in France in 2001. So I'm no example. But anyway at least I wrote an answer! Incidentally what I have done to keep my own practice in tune since moving to Finland five years ago is to try to return to practice with my teacher Luc de Fago when possible (but far too little!) and to go to Taipei to work with Master Wang and Julia. I should do more because I need to learn a lot more, but I am also caught up in the entanglements of the mundane world - not linked to taijiquan but to my work. Then of course I practice on my own and teach a class here on the recommendation of Master Wang and Julia and Luc. It's a great way to keep practice alive and to deepen it, but I do need to learn much more of the 'external' work - tuishou, the third duan, applications, sword, etc. etc. - from those who are more advanced. On the other hand I am able to continue deepening the 'internal' side of taijiquan on my own and that gives deep pleasure. Perhaps this works even better in solitude.



Photograph by Holly Leavy

# On Chinese

By Shiangtai Tuan

From the Chinese Language Email List, 22 Jan 2003



I have been asked whether this year is the year of goat, sheep or ram? Before answering that question, I feel I need to explain a few things about Chinese language.

I often hear people say: "Chinese is a very hard language. How can a person memorize tens of thousands of little pictures just to read a newspaper or even a children's storybook?" I will tell you how and tell you why some (Western) linguists consider

Chinese the easiest language to learn, that is, for those who have not taken any other languages as the mother tongue, like an intelligent being from outer space. This is like the metric system. It is a very easy system but it is hard to use if you are accustomed to another system. The United States has decided to change to the metric system since the '20s or '30s. It took the Americans nearly a century and nothing much has been accomplished yet. Haven't you heard little old ladies or gentlemen complain: "How can anyone remember that 453.59 grams goes into a pound, or is it 459.53?"

Some people call those little pictures characters and others call them pictograms. Linguists have special names for them and then they associate special meaning or interpretations for them. Not to be influenced by their conventions, for the purpose of this article, let's call each picture a Chinon since they form the basic units in Chinese language (comparing to: electron, photon, meson, proton, neutron, etc., being units in their own fields). Generally speaking, each Chinon has a unique pronunciation and one or more meanings (dictionary definitions). Rather than use those Chinon pictures, let us use the pronunciation aid, the Pinyin system, to represent the Chinons. Say, the Chinon that means "capital" as in "nation's capital" is pronounced just like the first syllable in "jingle." We represent it with "jing." Please notice that it is only a pronunciation aid. These four letters by no means spell the Chinese word for "capital." It is like the four letters l-a-i-k do not spell the English word "like." They are only the dictionary pronunciation aid for it. Besides, a different Chinon for "whale," a different Chinon for "clean," still another Chinon for "well" (where you get water): all pronounced like the first syllable of "jingle bells." The same four English letters would have to represent them, too. "jing" is not a word that means capital, whale, clean and well, it is only the pronunciation aid for those Chinons.

With this basic tool, we can go a step further. Starting from Chinon as building blocks, let's see how we can build upwards. Chinese nouns are built on the simple and reasonable concept of generic names. We already mentioned the Chinon, "capital," pronounced "jing." It is natural that the northern capital is called "bei" jing because the Chinon for "north" is "bei." Similarly, the Chinon for south is "nan." That's why Beijing and Nanjing did not come from nowhere but from the direct buildup from some simple, already existing, Chinons.

Another example: a Chinon meaning a cart or any moving carriage that has wheels is pronounced "che." Instead of requiring individual words for each concept, "huo che" (fire power plus carriage equal train), "qi che" (steam plus carriage equal automobile), and "jiao ta che" (foot power plus carriage equal bicycle) can be built from simple already existing Chinons. (In lesser extent, this happens in English, too, such as horse carriage, which is equivalent to "ma che," or, horse plus carriage.) Now you may see why I do not use the term "word" for such a little picture but use this temporary neutral term, Chinon. Some Western scholars would like to call the combinations such as huoche, qiche, jiaotache, words because in their mother tongue, train, automobile, bicycle, are words. (How many grams in a pound, did you say?)

The Chinon pronounced for animals like sheep: goat: "shan" or "gong" or male yang, yang. The year, 2003 (according to the year of yang, sheep, ram, etc. Asian who are interested in "fengsui," would even go as



"yang" is the generic name for animals like sheep: "mian" or wooly yang, mountain yang, ram: lamb: "gau" or little according to the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, starts Feb. 1, 2003 (according to the year of yang, sheep, ram, etc. Asian enthusiasts, like those who are interested in "alternative lifestyle" or "fengsui," would even go as far as naming it the year of black sheep. I would say, "baa baa," to that.

Imagine the combinations: X nouns and Y modifiers, some of them nouns themselves, can form X times Y such Chinon combinations. Of course, not all the combos are used, but you get the idea. And not only nouns: other parts of speech are also built up from basic blocks. As a result, more than 90 percent of what is printed on newspapers is within about one thousand of such Chinons, according to the textbook printed at Yale Press and used as a standard text for years.

Well, we have analyzed how a small number of such basic blocks can build up to the large vocabulary. You may still ask how one can manage to memorize those thousand or so different pictures. Now, we will go downwards to see how these Chinons are constructed. There are only five basic strokes in Chinese writing: horizontal, vertical, left diagonal line, right diagonal line and a dot. There are no curves, no circles, no roundabouts. From these strokes, small units are formed with shapes like a square box, a large plus sign and a plus sign with legs coming out of the center. The Western scholars who study Chinese like to name these subunits radicals. There are not too many radicals from which the total pictures can be constructed for each Chinon. So, to learn Chinese is to learn where those radicals go or to learn the basic five strokes—much less than the 26 letters in the English alphabet!

This discussion covers only the writing, which is considered the hardest part in Chinese language. Next time, if you like, I can tell you why the lack of conjugation and declension—and the lack of changes according to tenses, moods, cases, numbers, genders and persons—make Chinese the easiest of all advanced languages.

Shiangtai is a staff member at the Office of Information Technology of Duke University and a member of the Durham Savoyards.

# 'Check List' for Posture, Position and Movement

By Peter Clifford

*A Sufi was walking along a riverbank when he heard the sound of a fellow Sufi chanting one of the sutras on a small island in the middle of the river. To his surprise, and chagrin, the sutra was being chanted incorrectly, and so he immediately decided to go over to the island to instruct the fellow about his mistake.*

*Finding a small boat he rowed over to the island where he explained to the chanting Sufi about his error, and gave him a lesson in the correct way to chant the sutra. The island Sufi was most grateful for this advice, and he gave thanks wholeheartedly for the correction. When he was certain that the Sufi on the island had learnt to chant the sutra correctly, he returned to his boat, and started to row back across the river. After rowing back halfway he was alarmed to feel a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see his fellow Sufi, who apologized for having had to walk across the water to speak to him, but he was not completely sure that he had remembered the correct chanting of part of the sutra.*

Paying attention solely to one's posture and position in taijiquan is not the complete taiji way, as it may starve other aspects of the practice. This could result in practicing a form of calisthenics, rather than practicing taijiquan.

Nevertheless the importance and significance in giving attention to one's posture, position and movement in taijiquan is very clear. The moves have an application, and the application needs to be effective, and for this it is necessary to be aware, amongst other things, of one's position and posture.

With this in mind, here are a few short reminders, and points, about posture, position and movement. They are listed here without any commentary, and they are purely in the nature of 'a check list' to help develop one's practice. Whilst practicing it can be very instructive to observe, reflect on, or make a theme of any one, or any group, of these reminders.

The credit for all of them must be given to both my teacher, Wang Yen-nien, and to the Taijiquan Classics.

## **The Head:**

- The head is positioned so that it 'feels suspended as if from above'.
- 'Do not lower the head or look upward frequently or persistently.'

## **The Eyes:**

- The eyes are relaxed and look forward in a natural way towards your opponent; the peripheral vision is also relaxed and receptive.
- 'Keep your eyes on a level base and avoid any angry gaze.'
- 'The eyes, unless directed to move with the hands, look levelly forward with a quiet, comfortable but steady gaze.'

## **The Mouth:**

- The mouth is 'neither open, nor closed'. The tip of the tongue is on the roof of the mouth (the upper palate).

## **The Neck:**

- 'While in movement the neck should be relaxed, following the posture to right, or to left, or vice versa. Do not exert strength and avoid tension.'

## **The Mind:**

- 'The mind is focused on the breath and the moves, whilst remaining receptive to all outside surroundings and influence. Though aware of the outside, focus on what one is doing – the inside.'

- 'The mind moves the qi, and the qi moves the body'.
- 'First you should exercise your mind, then discipline your body.'
- 'Use the mind and not force.'

## **The Shoulders and Elbows:**

- The shoulders are relaxed and therefore dropped, and naturally rounded. Depress the elbows.

## **The Chest:**

- The chest is relaxed and slightly hollowed. 'In this way qi can sink to the dantien', and it enables a smooth flow of qi.

## **The Back:**

- The back is naturally rounded, complementary to the chest.
- 'The back has to be naturally raised. This posture is to be accompanied by the lowering of the shoulders. Avoid hunchback.'

## **The Hands:**

- Vertical Open Hand: The fingers are open 'not straight, not bent' and the thumb does not protrude. 'The back of the hand and the arm should be in a line. Do not let the wrist bend.'
- Single Whip Hand: 'The five fingers are bent slightly. Bring the five fingers together, but do not use strength.'
- Vertical Fist: 'The thumb is gently wrapped around the outside of the forefinger. The center of the fist should be slightly opened. Do not squeeze the fist closed.'
- 'The hands do not move independently'.

## **The Waist:**

- Relax the waist and hips.
- 'The waist is like an axel tree, and the four limbs like a wheel. If the waist cannot act like an axel tree then the limbs cannot revolve around it. If you want to make the axel rotate, it should be well lubricated.'
- 'Pay attention to your waist at all times.'

## **The Buttocks / Tail bone:**

- The tailbone is tucked under. 'Tip the buttocks forward and up slightly, and hook the lower three vertebrae forward.'
- The tailbone is naturally tucked in and then pulled very slightly up. This lines up the vertebrae in the back.

### The Knees:

- The knees are slightly bent; they are best positioned over the toes.

### The Feet:

- ‘Root internal power (jin) in the foot.’
- ‘Whether moving forward or backward, the feet, legs, and waist move in unison.’
- ‘The internal energy, qi, roots at the feet, then transfers through the legs, and is controlled by the waist, moving through the back to the arms and fingertips.’

### The Body:

- ‘Once you begin to move, the entire body must be light and limber. Each part of your body should be connected to every other part.’
- ‘The body should move like the rolling waves of the ocean.’
- ‘Do not lean the body in any direction’.
- ‘Your entire body should be controlled by the mind and spirit’
- **The Movement:**
- ‘Movements should constantly move from the substantial to the insubstantial’.
- ‘The essence of taijiquan lies in the regulation of movement and stillness.’
- ‘When in stillness you should be as the mountain. When in motion you should move like the water of the river.’
- ‘In movement all parts of the body are light and nimble, and strung together.... Movements are without imperfections, without hollowing or protruding too much, and without stops and starts.’
- ‘All movements are directed by force of intent (yi) and not by something external.’
- ‘Taiji is the mother of yin and yang. In motion they separate; in stillness they become one.’
- ‘Stand balanced, move like a wheel. Keep your center on one leg or the other.’
- ‘Seek stillness in movement.’

### Balance:

- ‘When you practice, you should stand with your posture balanced like a scale.’

### Daily Practice:

- Incorporating these reminders into daily practice is well recommended!

## About Tuishou

By Jean Luc Perot  
Translated by Don Klein

**SHŌU:** The hand is the primary tool in one’s active relationship with the world.

Hand that listens, tries and feels tactfully,

Hand that takes and gives, caresses or presses, welcomes, turns aside or pushes.

Hand of artist or artisan that knows how to express itself in an adequate gesture.

**TUĪ:** the expression *push hands* seems very reductive; I prefer *meeting of hands* or, if need be, *crossing of hands* as the foils in fencing are crossed.

Meeting because, behind the hand, there is always a human being and one who was not born human but who becomes such in the meeting of other people.

In this sense, the hand expresses all that is behind it: it concentrates the activity of the body, of the heart and of the spirit.

Our way of being and of behaving gives evidence of the way that we meet life. Behavior is acquired; it becomes refined and adjusted in the exercise.

The quality required and looked for in the exercise is presence: presence to oneself and to the other, with the capacities of listening, understanding and following energies in play, to chase away any fragility, fault or falsehood hidden in our attitude.

From this point of view, excellence should not be in the capacity to push another, but to unencumber oneself in playing well in the pleasure of the shared game where both persons become winners in the meeting.

The gain is in the knowledge of oneself and the opening of unsuspected dimensions revealed by the differences.

Relying on softness, relaxation and flexibility in the face of the differences allows oneself to avoid fear, tension and refusal, animal reaction, fight or flight, in the face of the unknown, the unexpected or the menace.

Besides the basic exercises that train possible responses to the push and form the initial vocabulary, it is advisable to enter the dance. Various stages always mark out progress on the subject of *Wúwéi*—no agitation, no activism, no wasted effort and no opposition in double weightedness.

**Dìng Bù:** Stepping is not allowed; one is planted, face-to-face, and one works in the recycling of energies. Get the lightest pressure, feel the small defect of anchoring, relaxation, structure that will make one lose balance when circulating force returning it to the sender, nullify it in the earth or fall in the space. The space should be found inside the posture marrying in a subtle cocktail the resistance of earth, the flow of water, the vacuity of the air and the acuteness of fire.

**Hòu Bù:** A small adaptation of the step to receive and return, allows one to better administer distance, the angle, rhythm or balance of power.

**Sǎn Bù:** movement is free; the space grows rich and allows one to accept more speed and determination. One will play on the reach, the investment and, by the magic of the transformation (*huà jīng*); one will create energy flowers in a varied bouquet.

# Taiji in Times of War and Peace

By Dale Napier

When I first describe taijiquan to people unfamiliar with it, I first say that it is a martial art. Most people do not know taiji as a martial art, they know it – or think they know it – as a pretty little dance, a beautiful exercise that looks very nice and tranquil. How can that be a martial art?

I am willing to take this seeming contradiction even further. Taiji, seemingly the most peaceful of the martial arts – and certainly the healthiest – was forged in times of peace within war. How can peace reside within war? How can an art like taiji emerge from it? What do we learn of this when we look within ourselves?

## Yin-Yang Basis of Taiji

To understand, we must first examine the philosophical underpinnings of taijiquan – which is frequently translated as “Grand Ultimate Fist.” Taiji is based on the philosophy of Yin and Yang – the theory of opposites. The taiji (yin-yang) symbol today is so ubiquitous that it is more common than the Christian cross, but do we really understand what it means?

None of us are all one thing or another. When one politician decries another as “evil,” he is obscuring the truth in order to achieve a political effect. All of us carry good and evil within us, and in our actions.

As verse 69 of the *Tao Te Ching* says,  
*There is no greater misfortune than underestimating your enemy. Underestimating your enemy means thinking that he is evil.*

...  
*When two great forces oppose each other,  
the victory will go to the one that knows how to yield.<sup>1</sup>*

Take any attribute, and we carry with us both the good and bad extreme of that attribute. No one is pure good or pure evil, all good intent or bad intent, all hard or soft,; and so on. The same is true for nations, and for martial arts.

Indeed, without evil there is no good; without softness there is no hardness. Each extreme is our barometer for measuring the opposite extreme. Draw a line anywhere through the center of the taiji symbol and it touches the black as well as the white, the white as well as the black. We are not sometimes good and sometimes evil; we are both, all the times, although in varying proportions.

What does this have to do with taiji and war? As Yang Cheng-fu once put it,

*Taiji is the art of concealing hardness within softness, like a needle within cotton.<sup>2</sup>*

The softness is evident to all, like the cotton wrapping. The hardness is there only for those wishing to penetrate below the surface.

## War and Peace

The origins of taiji are obscured within the mists of time. Of the many stories about its origins, not all can be true. Some are the stuff of legends. Yang Family taiji came into being more than

150 years ago, during the time that Manchurians ruled the Chinese empire.

We do know that early taijiquan was a vigorous, dangerous martial art that left its leading practitioners unbeatable – hence the name, Yang the Invincible, for Yang Luchan, creator of the original Yang Family taiji systems. How and why did it become the apparently soft, slow, gentle art we know today?

This is where the legend steps in. According to one story I was told, the subtlety of taijiquan was invented for the purpose of hiding the real art from the Manchu imperial family, which demanded training from the famous Yang Family fighters.

By this story, Luchan and his sons held back their important secrets so that they could not be beaten by the ruling invaders. They created a soft, weak-looking style wherein only a master could see beyond the surface and its underlying intricacies; the Manchurians would never know the real taiji, never be a danger to the Yang Family.

This is a great story that would be perfect for the idea of taiji emerging as a “peaceful” martial art during a time of war, except for one thing – it probably is not true. As has been pointed out, the Manchurians were neither weak nor stupid; otherwise they could never have conquered China. No, they knew real martial arts from pretense, and would demand only the real thing. Anything less would see Yang heads separated from Yang necks – a total violation of taiji principles.<sup>3</sup>

## Engagement and Non-Contention

To all but the most determined hegemonists – and there is ample evidence that many within the Bush administration wanted to invade Iraq no matter what – the invasion of Iraq was faced with a very taiji-like concern: to engage or not to engage. Those opposed to violence maintained that all American goals could be accomplished through diplomacy. That diplomacy had apparently worked for a dozen years was the cornerstone of this point of view.

In my own practice of taiji last year I was faced with a similar, if less consequential, decision. In 2001 my teacher, Master George Hu, started sending his senior students to tournaments. This was a very interesting turn of events because he had a reputation for avoiding tournaments.

Being a very competitive individual, if I was going to go, I wanted to win. Otherwise, why bother? Or so I thought at the time.

I came away with two medals, and a deep feeling of dissatisfaction that made me want to avoid that experience again. What had happened? In the moving step pushing hands competition my opponent and I had worked so hard that we both came away heavily winded and more tired than after a hard weightlifting session in the gym. I knew that was all wrong, but it was difficult to fully understand what had happened, or how to correct it.

It became clearer the following year. Immediately prior to the 2002 Taiji Legacy tournament, I attended the YMT festival in

Madison, Wisconsin. I discovered that within the YMT community there is considerable controversy over whether YMT should be allowed to evolve away from its martial roots to focus only on its health aspects.

Prominent in the proceedings were individuals who prefer YMT no longer be practiced as a martial art. My impression was that to them, the idea of taiji competition was not only to be avoided, it was simply unacceptable.

The tournament began the day after the festival ended, so I went to it imbued with the spirit of non-competition. My memory of the previous year was fresh enough that I was still unenthusiastic about participating. I had read enough of the ancient masters' words to know that competition per se was definitely considered inappropriate – despite the fact that they had all survived many death matches (yin-yang again?).

The result was that I went into pushing-hands competition without any intention of contending. I had pretty well dissolved my desire to “compete.” All I wanted was to come away feeling like I had experienced some real taiji.

That certainly happened. I came away with the same medal as before, which I no longer expected or cared about. Mostly, I came away with a feeling of that I had indeed experienced taiji. My final match, in which I was “bested” by a student of William

C. C. Chen, provided an interesting insight: taiji practiced at the fingertips. As with most such revelations, I learned more from “losing” than from “winning.”

Indeed, winning and losing were the same, or at least, happened together. Americans who supported the armed interventionism certainly believe we won. Americans who opposed it believe that in spite of any short-term military gain, the long-term prospect for American respect and prestige overseas is greatly reduced – in winning, we lost. Other countries certainly see in this the opportunity for advancing their own interests at our expense.

In winning these latest battles, has America really served its own best interests? As one who has seen firsthand the shortcomings of contending unnecessarily, I fear that we gained our victory at a cost we can ill afford.

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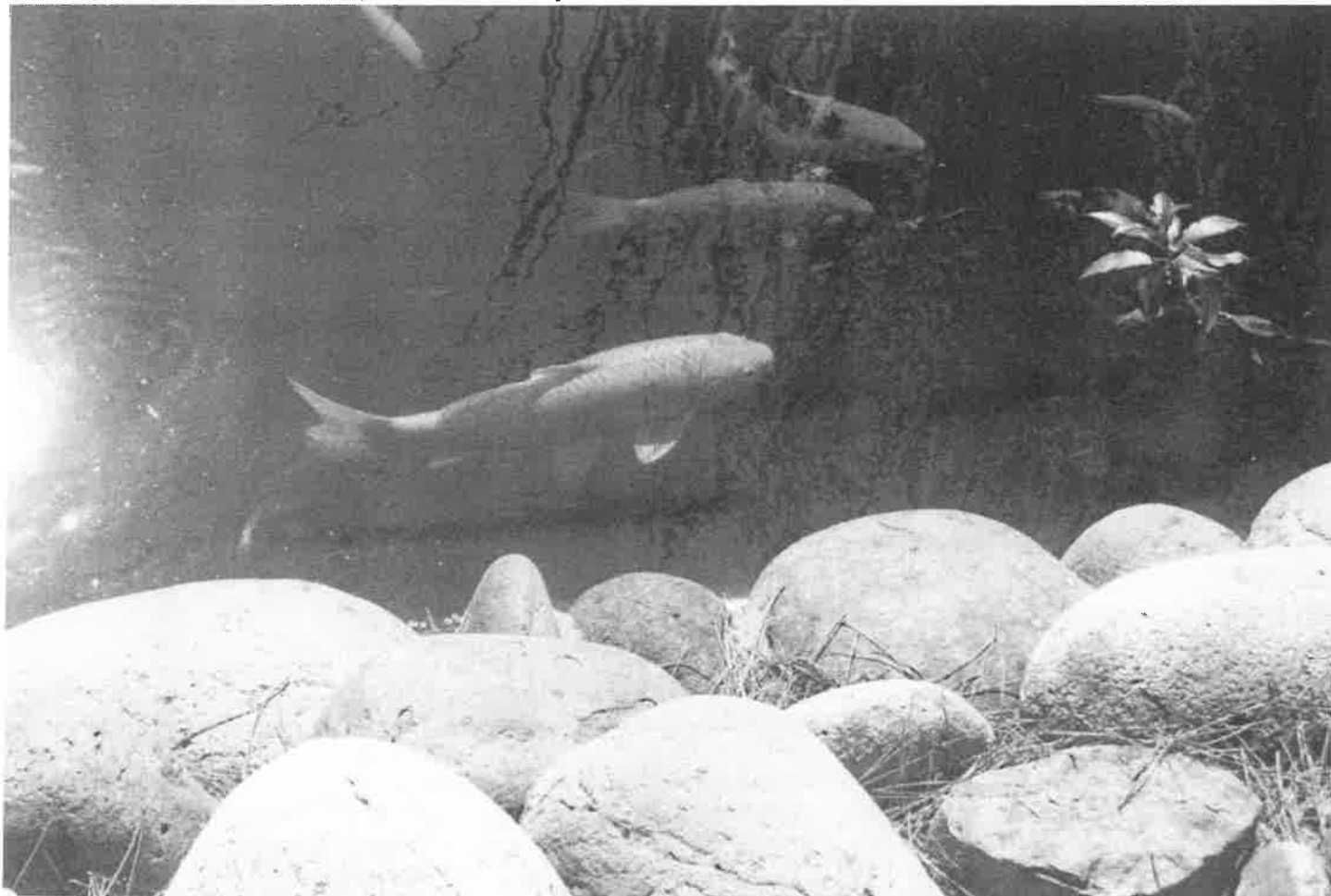
<sup>1</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, Steven Mitchell, translator, 1988, verse 69.

<sup>2</sup> *T'ai-chi Touchstones: Yang Family Secret Transmissions*, Douglas Wile, compiler and translator, Revised Edition, 1983, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> “The Complete (?) Yang Taijiquan System – Part 2”, Alex Yeo, *T'ai Chi magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 44.

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*Dale teaches Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan at the University of Houston.*



Photograph by Holly Leavy

## 三才 Sāncái

By Claudy Jeanmougin

Translated by Don Klein

Claudy used the term *Sāncái* in his answer to "Ask the Advisers" in the last *Journal*.  
We share his response to a copyreader's request for elaboration

In Chinese literature, whether it is philosophy or energy medicine, there is often the topic of *Sāncái*, a cosmogonic concept appropriate to the Chinese culture. If we consult dictionaries on this subject we find:

1. Ricci, under the character 才 (*cái*): "the three active Entities of the universe: Sky, Earth, Man."
2. Couvreur, under the character 才 (*cái*): "the three agents: the Sky, Earth and Man." And further down: "It (*Sāncái*) the action of the sky, the action of man, the action of Earth. It gathers these three powers and copies them; thus it obtains six of them."
3. Mathew, under the character 三 (*Sān*): "*Sāncái*: the three powers—Heaven, Earth and Man."

Entity, power, agent, all the dictionaries agree on the trilogy *Sky, Man and Earth*. Man results from energies of the Sky and the Earth and the set constitutes a trilogy of inseparable powers that are, in the Chinese opinion, each active on the other two. Remember that the Emperor of China was the son of the Sky and that his behavior could make the heavenly powers dissatisfied.

We find this concept in *I Jing*—with trigrams: the top line corresponds to Sky, the bottom to Earth, the middle to Man; with hexagrams: lines 5 and 6 belong to Sky, 1 and 2 to Earth, 3 and 4 to Man. "In ancient times the holy sages made the Book of Changes thus: Their purpose was to follow the order of nature and fate. Therefore they determined the tao of heaven and called it the dark and the light. They determined the tao of the earth and called it the yielding and the firm. They determined the tao of man and called it love and rectitude. They combined these three fundamental powers and doubled them; therefore in the

Book of Changes a sign is always formed by six lines." ("Shuo Kua/ Discussion of the Trigrams," *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, Richard Wilhem, Cary Baynes, Princeton University Press, Third ed. 1967, p. 264.)

In Chinese Traditional Medicine, the body is divided into three parts that are also named *Sāncái*: the head—Sky, the trunk—Man, lower limbs—Earth. Man contacts the earth with his feet and the sky with his head. Between the two, it is the report to the Man in the interaction of the energies of the Sky and the Earth. But that is not all: every part can again be decomposed according to the trilogy. So it is with the trunk: the rib cage represents the Sky, the belly with the internal organs represents Man and the pelvis with the reproductive organs represents Earth. Because the trunk belongs to the man, in this second decomposition, the rib cage will be the Sky of the Man. Et cetera . . .

In Chinese energetics, 五行 *Wū-xíng* (The dynamics of Five Phases) represented traditionally puts the Earth in the center, the Fire above, the Water below, the Wood to the left of the Earth and the Metal to the right of the Earth. In this configuration, we find the trilogy of *Sāncái*: for Sky we have the Phase Fire, for Man we have three Phases Metal, Wood and Earth, for Earth we have the Phase Water.

What has this to do with the practice of Taijiquan? First, the form is divided into three sequences representing the trilogy of *Sāncái*. There is an evolution of a person that evolves by going in the direction of the Sky. From one's consciousness of Earthly, one will be able to become Man; from one's consciousness of Man, one will bit by bit be able to escape Earthly contingencies

leading one to the Sky: we term that the *realization*. Returning to the classic representation of *Wū-xíng* mentioned earlier, this realization will be able to take place only on the condition that the Phases Wood and Metal merge in the Phase Earth. This time we have a vertical representation that shows the way of the Sky by escaping the lowest links, these hidden instincts (psychoanalysts) that belong to the Phase Water.

To return in more practical notions, it is always possible to return to this trilogy. In a previous article ("Ask the Advisers," *AYMTA Journal*, Vol 10, No. 2, Winter 2002, p. 29), I hinted at *Sāncái* in speaking about the rhythm with base three for the learning of Taijiquan (this is true also in any learning). I indicate this to say that in every *Cái* it is always possible to infinitely divide by three. In anatomy, for example, we find three segments in every member. The foot can be divided into three: heel (tarsus), arc of the foot (metatarsus) and toes. In bipedal support, as in some postures of Taijiquan, it is possible to distribute the physical mass according to the trilogy: a third on the front foot, a third on the heel of the rear foot, a third on the front for the rear foot.

Everything is always possible; it is enough to respect the general principles that govern Taijiquan. It seems nevertheless that the theory of *Sāncái* is more in touch with the evolution of the human being towards its realization. In addition, *Sāncái* does not forbid anything from the instant where the way of the Sky is not blocked. Everything is possible with *Sāncái*! We just have to specify the root of our thought.



## On the Bookshelf

Ramblings by Don Klein

An interesting and unexpected book that is being passed around the taiji grapevine is Pete Egoscue's *Pain Free: A Revolutionary Method for Stopping Chronic Pain* (with Roger Gittanes, Bantam, 2000). From my perspective it shares primary concepts with the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique and taijiquan, to return the body to primal and efficient functionality: "rediscovering the body's design and allowing it to work as intended" (p. 3). Egoscue believes modern man has allowed

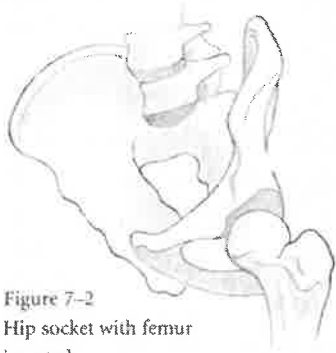


Figure 7-2  
Hip socket with femur inserted.

muscles to degenerate, and then the body "hijacks peripheral muscles to do the work that should be done by major postural muscles were they not atrophied" (p. 13), so that "dysfunction leads to more dysfunction." His method then "is based on its ability to reconnect individuals to their kinesthetic sense or muscle memory, of how things feel beneath the surface" (p. 31).

The book's 20 to 30 exercises are simple postures, most held for a period of time, designed to remove the peripheral muscles from the picture. There are chapters specific to the foot, the ankle, the knee, the spine, the shoulder, the arm and the neck. In each Egoscue explains the musculoskeletal structures involved, how dysfunctions arise and problems arising from such. He prescribes exercises (or *e-cises*) for realignment and return to correct functionality.



Many exercises address various muscle groups: for example Static Back (in TJQ terms, to help achieve "open back," push out/flatten the lower back) is included in the sections for the foot and ankle, knee, neck, hips and shoulder, indicating different muscle release or engagement in each case. Much of the discussion in the TJQ community about *Pain Free* relates to concepts of opening the *mingmén*, flattening and relaxing the lower back, sinking into taiji posture, opening the *kuà*, releasing the hip, correct knee alignment, gaining "turtle back."

Perhaps the basic concept is simply *sōng*: the body is relaxed into alignment, rather than forced into it.

外三合	Wài sān hé	Three External Harmonies
手與足合	shǒu yǔ zú hé	Hand Harmonizes With Foot
肩與跨合	jiān yǔ kuà hé	Shoulder Harmonizes With Hip
肘與膝合	zhǒu yǔ xī hé	Elbow Harmonizes With Knee

An overt segue to *Moving Toward Harmony* by Eric Oberg (Far Eastern Press, 2000).

The book is a series of aphorisms, at times haiku-like, about 合氣道 Hé qì dào in guóyǔ - *the way of harmony and energy*. While the subject is Aikido and many pieces are specifically titled from its vocabulary - *Ikkyo*, *Irimi*, *Shihonage*, *Ukemi* - I find the book helps not only to illuminate commonalities with taijiquan, but opens new perspectives on our art.

### Yielding/Accepting

*Tai no henka (Turn the Body)*

When you meet  
resistance  
do not fight harder  
Let the attack  
change you

### Rooting

*The Second Step*

When moving  
forward  
you may meet an  
obstacle  
Step back and let  
your mind settle  
into the ground

*Heaven and Earth*

When you want to realize an idea  
first send your root into the ground  
When you are firmly rooted  
let inspiration move you  
The results will be less dramatic but more satisfying

### Listening

*Receiving*

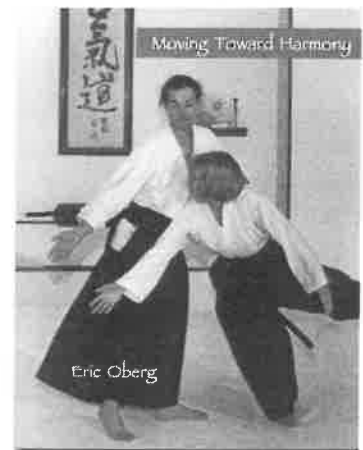
Learn to listen with the whole body

### Transforming

*Transformation*

The other person will change you  
Let it happen  
Out of apparent conflict will come growth

I also recommend it to "get a feel" for Aikido itself, at least from one very imagist philosophic practitioner.



## Teaching Tips – Some Notes

By Mark A. Linett

Teachers of Taijiquan may agree that teaching is not only an excellent way to go on with the practice, but also at the same time a way to develop and deepen their practice. But after many years (and countless minutes) of practice as a student, how does a person make the transition to being a teacher?

When starting a class, we obviously think of the basic exercises, but there are movements that can complement the exercises to create a fresh alternative. An exercise that Master Wang showed years ago in a form class comes to mind. He demonstrated the movement of the waist in two ways; with the feet at shoulder width, the waist moves in a circle or in a flat eight configuration. It is also possible to move the waist in a circle with all the weight on one leg; the front leg turning on the ball of the foot; the arms naturally follow the momentum of the waist. There are numerous Chi Gung exercises that can also be practiced with the basic exercises. Most of the exercises are rather easy to learn and may offer an excellent method of practicing some of the most basic aspects of the Taiji curriculum. Also something that is part of our basic exercises is the standing exercise. Certainly one thinks of *mǎbù* or the horse stance. The arms may be held at waist height or the palms can be facing the body with arms in a posture as if hugging a tree. There are many variations of this standing meditation posture.

A challenging and exciting aspect of teaching is the constant need make decisions and adjustments based on what is happening with a class in any given moment. One quickly discovers that each class learns at its own pace and that each student has his or her own approach to learning. He/she has to walk a kind of tightrope here in terms of presenting material that is interesting and challenging to more gifted and dedicated students while also being aware of not wanting to leave behind students who are working at a slower pace. The key here is perhaps that students at all levels benefit from learning and practicing over and over again the basic techniques and skills.

Experienced students even with many years of experience are constantly practicing basic exercises to refine their skills. Also students may discover that there is always something new to see in movements; even movements they thought they knew. The spirit of repetition and refinement is very important here. Students have commented that they find that the basic exercises become deeper and more interesting with more and more practice.

Awareness is essential to how much benefit one derives from repeatedly practicing a movement. An integral part of the practice is perhaps being focused, concentrated and relaxed in the midst of practice; even those movement that have been practiced numerous times before.

With regard to repetition there are of course several approaches a teacher can use. In some classes, students may benefit from isolating and concentrating on one movement; repeating until students feel comfortable and confident. It is possible to practice Grasp the Sparrow's Tail in a large circle configuration then moving to a small circle configuration. Then perhaps shifting back and forth between them. Then practicing with a partner can help to better visualize the movement and its application. Grasp the Sparrow's Tail can also it can be practiced by first going right as we do in the form and then going left and again repeating right and left; without moving onto Single Whip.

Some other suggestions that might be helpful is to show clearly the direction and focus of pushes and punches. This kind of clarity helps students to be clearer in the form as well as in push-hands. For instance, the direction of pull down or *cǎi* can be shown to be a straight push toward *Dàntián*. Another way of practicing and showing a movement is to ask students to pause in a particular position and the teacher can move around the class demonstrating the correct position of the hands. When doing (*liè*) twist the joint, for example, the teacher can insert his/her arm between the hands and show how the hands are in contact with the wrist and elbow.

Something else that comes to mind is that it is helpful for the teacher to be forward looking; in the sense of perhaps offering medium-range goals along the way. In learning the Thirteen Postures students are in a sense preparing for the practice of *Bāfǎ* or the eight-step method that is practiced with a partner. In learning the Thirteen Postures, one first learns the hand movements, the stepping, the breathing and the directions among other things. But in practicing the same movements with a partner one starts to develop the kind of awareness, skills and sensitivity practiced in push hands. There is a kind of a connectedness and totality that one begins to see in the practice that is perhaps an encouragement to students to continue on in the practice.

Finally teaching becomes a fine art when teachers really begin to communicate and listen to their students; perhaps in the way that one listens with one's heart and mind when practicing push hands.

Furthermore, in any sort of teaching situation, students respond well to a teacher who brings a degree of creativity, thoughtfulness and wisdom to their classes along with their experience, expertise and maybe even more than a dash of humor.

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Mark has just relocated from Taipei to Honolulu.

## 2001-2003 AYMTA Board of Directors

### Charlie Adamec

I have been studying Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan for about 10 years. Most of my teachers are still involved with the YMT community. I also studied for a brief time in Taiwan. Today, I am studying acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine fulltime. I also teach Taiji twice a week in a schoolyard up the street from my apartment.



### Thomas W. Campbell

I have studied and practiced Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan with Robert Politzer in New York City for 10 years. In that time I have also had the pleasure to study on numerous occasions with Wang Yen-nien and Julia Fairchild in both Europe and the United States. Under the gracious hosting of Kathryn and Don Coleman at the 2002 Second International YMT Festival I taught the Kunlun Sword Form – and enjoyed the company of some really great folk. On Sunday Mornings during the spring and summer I teach a Yangjia Michuan class in front of the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. Except for trying to figure out what David Carradine and Bruce Lee were up to when I was a kid, Yangjia Michuan is the only Martial Art that I have practiced. I am also a filmmaker and teach at Adelphi University in New York City. My short film “Rooftop Serenade,” starring fellow YMT practitioners Gretchen MacLane and George Vlachos, was recently was a finalist in the Telly awards.



### Don Klein

I’m retired: ex-college faculty and software engineer (sequentially). When I was teaching I passed up the opportunity to study with Gia-Fu Feng while he was a visiting faculty at my college. So my first taijiquan experience ended up being a variant of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan taught by a student of H. H. Lui’s (a classmate of Don Jones). I was also learning traditional Yang style from Frank Fong in Omaha NE. Our teacher moved away leaving an orphaned class; Kay and I were teaching beginning taiji and a student of Julia Fairchild’s showed up. Shalamee didn’t enroll in the classes, but lent us Volume I of *Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan* and a video tape of Laoshi playing the form: a form we recognized – however different our execution of the moves were. (Somewhere in the same timeframe we started attending biannual workshops with George Ling Hu, not knowing that he had been a student of Wang Yen-nien’s and a friend of Lui’s.) When the New York workshop with Wang Yen-nien was canceled, we located the only known YMT practitioner in Michigan, Jim Carlson—two hours south of us in Centreville, convinced him to return to teaching taijiquan, and made our first visit to Taipei to study at the Yen-nien Daoguan only a few months later.



### Terri Pelliteri

Legal name Teresa Skolaski-Pellitteri. I have been practicing Taijiquan and Tuishou since 1993 as a student of Don Coleman/Empty Mind Full Belly School of Internal Boxing Art in Madison Wisconsin and in the past year have led a “Taiji Club” for the school. Working in the mental health field for close to 30 years, as a practitioner, educator, and advocate I’ve begun to combine my experiences by teaching Taijiquan at the drop-in-center for people with mental illness. I am also very interested in the study of culture and spiritual practice and facilitate training experiences relating to cultural competence and creating inclusive environments. Regardless of the path I’m on, I can see the relevance of Taijiquan and Tuishou to my relationship with the collective.



### Jan Phillips

I started studying taijiquan on March 5, 1983 in Oakland, California under the tutelage of Sifu Tsuei Wei who had studied with Master Wang Yen-nien decades earlier in Taiwan. In 1992, when Tsuei Wei stopped teaching, some of his students formed the Taoist Taijiquan Association where Jim Douglas and I taught. In 2000, I moved to the Sierra foothills (100 miles east of San Francisco) and converted a barn into a taiji studio where I’ve resumed teaching



## Directory of AYMTA Member Instructors

The following AYMTA members are Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan instructors in North America. The addresses listed are for mailing purposes only. Please contact instructors by mail, phone or email for specific information about class times and locations. If you are currently teaching Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan in the United States, are a member of AYMTA and would like to be included in this list, contact the Secretary, Terri Pellitteri (address below under Wisconsin). If you are unable to contact an instructor or need additional information, please contact the Secretary. If you are looking for an instructor outside of North America, consult the Worldwide Directory.

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Price

Non-  
Member  
Price

## MEMBERSHIP

One Year Regular Membership	\$35	\$35
One Year Family or Student Membership	\$20	\$20

## BOOKS

<b>YANG FAMILY HIDDEN TRADITION OF TAIJIQUAN, ILLUSTRATED AND EXPLAINED</b> by Wang Yen-nien		
Vol. I (2 <sup>nd</sup> Ed.): The basic exercises and all three sections of the form.		
English/French	\$70	\$95
Chinese/Japanese	\$70	\$95
Vol. II (1 <sup>st</sup> Ed.): Martial Applications		
English/French	\$85	\$115
Chinese/Japanese	\$85	\$115

## FANS

<b>BAMBOO FANS</b>	\$15	\$20
Lightweight and highlighted by the Chinese characters 延年 Yán Nián (literally extended years).		

## AUDIOTAPES

<b>YANGJIA MICHUAN TAIJIQUAN</b> by Wang Yen-nien A 90-minute tape of the breathing and names of the form movements called out in Chinese.	\$15	\$20
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## VIDEOS, VCDs, DVD-Rs

VCDs will play in many DVD players as well as on computers; ensure that your DVD player will play DVD-Rs before ordering

<b>WYN IN TAINAN (1979) Video, DVD or VCD</b> Wang Yen-nien demonstrating YMT Sections 1,2,3, Kunlun (Old) Sword, WuDang (New) Sword. A little dark but fun - no sound - looks like a Buster Keaton.	\$35	\$45
<b>WYN DEMONSTRATING YANGJIA MICHUAN TAIJIQUAN – Video, DVD or VCD.</b> Videotaped in the early 1980s in Japan and in Taiwan, this tape shows Wang Yen-nien demonstrating the following: YMT basic exercises, YMT Sections 1,2,3, Tuishou basic exercises, Fajin exercises, Thirteen Postures and Kunlun (Old) Sword Form. The names of the postures are called out in Japanese. 99 minutes.	\$30	\$40
<b>STITCHING TAIJIQUAN NETHERLANDS WORKSHOP (1989) Video, DVD or VCD</b> WYN teaching Fan, 1 <sup>st</sup> Duan and Basic Push Hands Exercises, with Julia Fairchild and Sabine Metzle assisting.	\$30	\$40
<b>RECORD OF NATIONAL SPORTS DAY DEMONSTRATION (1994) Video, DVD or VCD</b> Group Demonstration of 1 <sup>st</sup> duan. Visits 10 Taipei teaching areas with the various coaches & groups training form & weapons for National Sports Day demonstrations.	\$30	\$40
<b>YMT: A RECORD OF TEACHER TRAINING COURSE (1996) Video, DVD or VCD</b> Demonstrating all 3 duans and each move separately with WYN commenting on correct & incorrect ways to practice selected moves. The audioteape is extracted from the sound on this video. 2 Tapes.	\$60	\$80
<b>PUSH HANDS BASIC EXERCISES (1996) VHS ONLY</b> Record of New York WYN Workshop detailing the 15 tuishou exercises. 5 tapes.	\$150	\$205
<b>THIRD DUAN (1996) VHS ONLY</b> This step-by-step instructional video taught by Wang Yen-nien for students new to the 3 <sup>rd</sup> duan, those who want a review aid, or for instructors who wish to explore all the rich details of the form. 3 tapes.	\$90	\$120

## JOURNALS

<b>Vol 8 #2 FALL 2000</b> : Wang Yen-Nien Celebrating Fifty Years of Teaching	\$15	\$25
<b>Vol 4 #1, # 2; Vol 5 #1, # 2; Vol 6 #1, #2; Vol 7 #1, #2; Vol 9 #1, #2; Vol 10 #1, #2</b>	\$10	\$15

**Payment:** only checks drawn on US banks, money orders, and wire transfers are accepted.

**Availability:** A basic inventory is maintained, but not all items may be in stock; enquire about availability of DVDs and VCDs. Only NTSC format videos are stocked although PAL & SECAM are available. Items ordered from Taiwan take up to 2 weeks to arrive by airmail (tapes, VCDs and DVDs) and 8 weeks by surface mail (books).

**Shipping & Handling :** Prices include shipping for orders in the contiguous United states.

Please inquire about shipping costs outside of the contiguous United States at the address below or by email:

"Jan Phillips" <Aymta@aol.com>

**Ordering:** Please make your check payable to **AYMTA** and mail to:

Jan Phillips  
 AYMTA Treasurer  
 PO Box 1067  
 Newcastle, CA 95658

# AYMTA

## What is AYMTA?

- The American Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan Association (AYMTA) is a nonprofit public benefit corporation. The specific purposes for which this corporation is organized are to transmit, perpetuate, promote and further the growth of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan (YMT) in the United States.

## What is Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan?

- YMT (Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan), translated as Yang Family Hidden Tradition, was created by Yang Luchan. Yang Luchan passed it on to his son Yang Jianhou. Yang Jianhou passed it on to Zhang Qinlin. Zhang Qinlin passed it on to Wang Yen-nien. Master Wang, in order to prevent the loss of this art, has passed it on to all who are interested in carrying on the Yangjia Michuan style.

## Member Eligibility

- Submit a completed and signed application form.
- Pay the annual fee.
- Support the purpose and objectives of AYMTA
- Members need not be YMT practitioners.
- Members are welcome from all over the world

## The Objectives of AYMTA

- To promote and respect the quality and integrity of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan as taught and transmitted by Wang Yen-nien
- To conduct workshops and public demonstrations in YMT.
- To educate the public that the purpose of YMT is to promote health, to prolong the life span, to calm the mind and harmonize the spirit, to develop the art of self-defense, and to provide the entry level to the Great Dao.
- To provide YMT instructors for the public.
- To provide interested members with opportunities to develop the skills necessary to become YMT instructors.
- To provide assistance to member instructors in obtaining required documentation when requested.
- To help instructors improve their teaching and build consistency in teaching YMT.
- To publish a journal (twice a year) and newsletter for members

## Annual Fee

- Regular: US\$35 per Year
- Family: US\$20 per Year
- Full Time Student: US\$20 per Year

美洲楊家秘傳太極拳協會

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