



Six years ago, Sifu Gary Wragg started the London Competition to give trainee judges experience of working alongside tai chi style leading experts and gain supervised hands-on experience with judging tai chi events. His Judges Seminar programme which has been running since 2005, trains experienced tai chi players to judge styles other than their own. This enables them when judging competition to use specific criteria appropriate for the style being performed, rather than comparing it to criteria from their own style. The goal is to educate people judging forms events to be able to make a fair and informed objective judgement about the performance being viewed.

From the start, the project was welcomed and was sponsored by the Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy, Bethnal Green and the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain with the support of several leading members of the UK tai chi chuan community. For example, Masters Faye and Tary Yip, Richard O'Dell, Liming Yue, Shelagh Grandpierre, and Simon Watson, among others, have contributed their knowledge and expertise to enhance the quality and capability of judges at national and international tai chi competitions, by giving many seminars on their style with focus on hand and weapons forms. Since then, a number of Tai Chi Union members involved in the programme have learned how to evaluate tai chi hand and weapons forms from the various traditional styles, and some have officiated at numerous national and international competitions.

The last two years have seen a new level of integration between the Judges Seminar Programme and the competition that underscores the link between the two and gives trainee judges a chance to practise their judging skills whilst the learning is still fresh in their minds. For example, the 2013 year's seminar, held the day before the Competition, was on judging tai chi sword. Each style leader had an hour to present the details of their style's specific criteria and approach to the weapon and to demonstrate the finesse of its execution. Masters Gary Wragg and Jonathan Krehm (Wu), Richard O'Dell (Wudang), Tary Yip (Modern Tai Chi), Liming Yue (Chen), Ceciel Kroes (Cheng Man-Ching) and Simon Watson (Yang) all gave beautiful, clear demonstrations and explained how each style interprets the common tai chi principles. This close coordination between the Seminars and the Competition is supported by top style leaders to the event, and fosters the spirit of cooperation and respect. Plus we all have a great time!

The 6th Annual London Competition on 2nd June 2013 in Hackney, at the Queensbridge Leisure Centre was the largest since the event began. With nearly 135 competitors, plus officials, friends and family, about 200 people enjoyed a whole day of individual and group events with participants ranging from seven years old to veterans. The Juniors events, group forms and san shou, and qigong competition events are now a regular feature of this competition, alongside traditional individual forms and push hands competition. Despite having a packed house, many commented on the happy vibe that filled the hall, along with the early summer sunshine.

In 2013, as members of the International Wu Style Federation, we were also particularly delighted to have with us Jonathan Krehm, the number three Disciple of Grandmaster (Eddie) Wu Kwong Yu, and one of the earliest members of Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Toronto, started by Grandmaster Wu in 1973. Jonathan gave us the benefit of his long years of practice in Toronto at the Saturday Judges Seminar and was chief judge of the Wu style desk at the Competition. It was unfortunate that Grandmaster Wu was unable to attend as originally planned; he sent his apologies at the last minute due to an unavoidable conflicting engagement in Beijing.

Forms

The four forms desks were busy most of the day judging demonstrations of single and group forms, as well as san shou in 36 separate events. The quality of the performances provided an interesting and lively time for all spectators. Over the years participants have offered increasing categories of entries and one of the interesting features has been the difference in approach to competition displays, some are much more keen to compete in a group form. Tony Ulatowski mentioned that his group of students strongly bonded whilst training for their group form demonstration, and they found that they really enjoyed training for it and participating in the day. Cathy Birkinhead expressed a similar sentiment. She came along just to watch in 2012 and in 2013 decided to participate. To her surprise, she took the gold medal in the Open Wudang Hand Form category

At the London Competition, each Forms Desk is organised by style, and has a head judge who is a top expert in that style. Two other judges sitting at the desk are an assistant judge, usually from the same style, and a trainee judge who has normally been to several of the Seminars and is mainly from a different style (see box). Following each performance, the three confer so that the trainee has an immediate opportunity to put their new learning from the previous day's judges workshop into action with the support of an expert in the field. The scale and approach to arriving at a score for each contestant are the same as those used at international competitions and in the Olympics, which helps place the level of the performance into objective context.

Push Hands

The push hands desks offered much excitement in 2013 with high quality refereeing from members of Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy Bethnal Green and a guest appearance from Cliff Cox, well known to many as the most experienced referee from the British Open. It was excellent to see more and more competitors able to stay true to their training, gaining points by using recognisable techniques under pressure. To assist referees, the London Competition for Traditional Tai Chi Chuan trains foot judges to raise a flag when they see a footing infraction in fixed feet events. Having foot judges is a value to referees whose sight line to a lifted back heel may be blocked.

In moving step, Jae Willis, Chief Instructor of the The Somerset Training Centre for Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan took the gold medal in two weight classes, his own middleweight and in the heavyweight category. On the women's side, Maureen Vigille from Long Fei Tai Chi in London took gold in both fixed feet and moving step against the same opponent, silver medal winner was Samantha Casey, from Shong Ding Lao Hu in Harrogate.

The Junior Competitors

Almost from the beginning the London Competition for Traditional Tai Chi Chuan offered the opportunity for children to participate in Forms and Push Hands events. Only a few entered in the early years of the competition, mainly from Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy Bethnal Green.

Cathy Birkinhead: Wudang Sabre



James Norman: Health Qigong



Male Moving Light: Andrew Deeming v Liam Grange



Kasha Yip: Junior Mixed Weapons Gold Medal



Dan Docherty with Junior Welterweight Fixed Feet Winners



The children amaze us all with the soft direct naturalness of their movement and the fearlessness of their minds.

Almost all styles and many clubs were represented, with five Chen style junior competitors from three clubs, and fourteen Wu stylists from three clubs. The top score for hand forms was achieved by Alex Thompson-Carse from Lively Tiger Tai Chi in Staffordshire. Twelve juniors also competed in weapons forms and the overall winner was Kasha Yip from Deyin Tai Chi in Wolverhampton with an impressive fan form.

For the first time this year there was a

moving step Push Hands event for children. To be safe, junior entries in this event were authorised not only by their parents but also their tai chi instructors. It turned out to be a great success. The First Aider said he had very little to do – only a couple of ice packs were needed during the entire competition. The Guven family had three children in the Push Hands events. They train at their school with Wu's Academy Archway. Their mum, Jayne, noted her six-year old trains kung fu and tai chi most days of the week. I saw his brother and sister in a bout of Fixed Step Pushing Hands. These kids train at their school with Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy Archway Chief Instructor Don Spargo. Jayne noted that after practice, the kids are quieter, and better able to pay attention to their lessons.

Another group of junior competitors who train together said they liked learning tai chi for self-defence and for hitting things! And that the best thing about the competition was winning medals.

Health Qigong

Among the many special things at the London Competition for Traditional Tai Chi Chuan is the Qigong event in collaboration with the British Health Qigong Association (BHQA). The event is similar to Forms events and is judged on criteria developed by Masters Faye and Tary Yip, who lead the Association. Competition forms are the ones taught and supported by BHQA, modified where necessary to fit into six minutes. Entries came from London, Nottingham and Surrey, performing sets originating from the Chinese Health Qigong Association with which the BHQA is federated. The gold medal this year was won by Vicky Ahern from The Chi Clinic in Surrey who performed a beautiful Five Animal Frolics (Wu Xin Xe). The silver medal went to James Norman performing the same set. Demonstration sets are also welcome in the Qigong event.

Upcoming - the 2014 Competition

Feedback from participants and our own observations made it clear that the London Competition has outgrown the Queensbridge Sports Centre. So in 2014 the London Competition will be held on Sunday, 1st June at Clissold Leisure Centre in Stoke Newington.

2014 is a special year as it marks the 25th anniversary for Sifu Gary Wragg of the first Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in the UK and Europe. Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy London/Bethnal Green are inviting players from other UK centres and Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academies worldwide to participate in various events and celebrate with us. The celebrations follow the momentous occasion of the anniversaries in 2012 marking 75 years of Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Hong Kong and the 50 years for Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy, Singapore.

As part of the Anniversary celebrations, Grandmaster and 5th Generation Gatekeeper of the Wu Style, Sifu (Eddie) Wu Kwong Yu, will be attending from Hong Kong and offering a one-day workshop in London for tai chi players of all styles on 24th May 2014.

The Anniversary events will continue with an evening celebration on 29th May including demonstrations and dinner at Kings Place in London by all represented Wu-style academies.

We are delighted to announce that Grandmaster Wu will be speaking at the Judges Seminar on 31st May. The 2014 seminar topic concerns style-specific criteria, and will concentrate mainly on hand forms.

The Anniversary celebrations culminate on Sunday 1st June 2014 with the 7th London Competition for Traditional Tai Chi Chuan. The Competition this year will incorporate the 3rd International Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Federation Competition.