

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN & ORIENTAL ARTS

NO. 61

£4.00

ANNIVERSARY EDITION

TCUGB

30 YEARS & COUNTING

THIS SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION INCLUDES
A SELECTION OF ARTICLES FROM THE FIRST TO
THE MOST RECENT EDITIONS

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Editor
Mark J. Langweiler

Editorial Assistant
Karen Limb

Design & Layout
Norah Langweiler
<https://nlangweiler.myportfolio.com>

Cover Photo by Lauza Loistl

Chairman
Mark Peters

Vice Chairman
Dan Docherty

Magazine Address:
225 Murchison Road
London E10 6LT
0044 753 248 3160
mlangweiler@yahoo.com

The Journal of the Tai Chi
Union for Great Britain
www.taichiunion.com

Secretary
Peter Ballam

Treasurer
Aileen Cromar Mandic

Executive Committee
Mark Peters (Chair)
Dan Docherty (Vice Chair)
Peter Ballam (Secretary)
Marnix Wells
Shelagh Grandpierre
Barry McGinlay
Chris Thomas
Tina Faulkner
Mark Corcoran
Wes Mollison





Table of Contents

4	Letter from the Editor
5	Chairman's Letter and Editorial (Issue 1)
6	Interview with Dan Docherty
7	Professor Cheng Man-Ching... A late night chat with the Main Man (Issue 2)
10	Interview with Mark Peters
12	Why Practice Tai Chi Chuan Slowly? (Issue 8)
13	Interview with Gary Wragg
14	The Essence of Movement (Issue 10)
15	Interview with Peter Ballam
17	Tai Chi as a Health Aid (Issue 17)
19	A Hermit, a Westerner, and a Motorcyclist (Issue 18)
21	Interview with Shelagh Granpierre
22	Dan Docherty - At the Cutting Edge of Tai Chi (Issue 19)
28	Interview with Chris Thomas
30	Chen Hsin Tui Shou - The Art of Effortless Power (Issue 20)
33	Interview with Marnix Wells
34	Experimenting with Principles (Issue 24)
35	Interview with Tina Faulkner Elders
36	Yi Qi Li (Issue 29)
37	Interview with Wes Mollison
39	Tai Chi and Spirituality (Issue 39)
42	Interview with Mark Corcoran
43	Minding the Movement of the Body (Issue 42)
45	Interview with Bob Lowey
47	Taiji Sword Handling (Issue 47)
49	An American Taoist (Issue 51)
54	Interview with Barry McGinlay
55	Taiji Basic Movement Patterns and Body Cohesion (Issue 52)
60	The Great Heaven Circuit

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the 30th Anniversary edition of the Journal of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain. The current issue commemorates the founding of the Tai Chi Union. The TCUGB was founded in 1990, three years before the first issue. The Journal started as a modest publication, 24 pages black and white, a couple of articles, in the autumn of 1993.

From the beginning Ronnie Robinson, the first editor and publications guiding light, offered a variety of outlooks, discussions and thoughts that encompassed all styles of tai chi chuan and qigong. It was this broad stance that helped unite Chinese internal art practitioners from all regions of the United Kingdom. This founding principle continues to this day.

To celebrate 30 years of the Union we have collected a series of articles from many of the past issues starting with the Chairman's Welcome letter from the very first issue from the autumn of 1993.

In addition to the various articles, you will find interspersed throughout brief 'interviews' with past and current members

of the executive committee, those who have steered the Union from the beginning. Each came to tai chi and the Tai Chi Union in their own way and have been and continue to be instrumental in the growth and development of tai chi and qigong.

As George Santayana wrote:

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it!'

Taking that to heart, we will remember the past and use that knowledge to forge the continued development of the art we have all discovered.

Finally, a major step forward in the recognition of tai chi chuan has occurred recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) has placed tai chi chuan on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Recognition and placement on the List will encourage increased visibility and dialogue of the diversity found within the world-wide tai chi chuan community.


EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The first issue of the Journal of the Tai Chi union for Great Britain appeared in the Autumn of 1993. Though only 24 pages with one colour, it was the model for all the successive issues to the present. Below is the 'Welcome Letter' by Gary Wragg, the Chairman of the TCUGB at the time as well as the first Editorial by then editor Ronnie Robinson.

Chairman's Letter

BY GARY WRAGG | ISSUE 1, AUTUMN 1993

"Teach each one to prolong his life it is not solely for martial arts" was the advice of Chang Sang Feng, founder of Tai Chi Ch'uan.

Since the Song dynasty in China, the art of Tai Chi Ch'uan has blossomed into a range of styles which were practised throughout the world, bringing through the dreams of past masters. The benefits of Tai Chi Ch'uan have become widely recognised, and its popularity increases all the time.

The art is vibrantly alive in the UK, for which the Tai Chi Union of Great Britain can

take much credit. We have lifted it out of the shadows, and we must continue to encourage future growth and excellence. This can be done not only by our own private practice, but also by exchanging and sharing our experience.

The evolution and standards of the internal arts in this country is what we make it, and we welcome your views on the subject. In the meantime, please encourage other practitioners to join us.

Editorial

BY RONNIE ROBINSON | ISSUE 1

Becoming editor of the Tai Chi newsletter, I hoped to create a magazine which reflected the interest and scope that Tai Chi offers. I contacted the members to enlist their help with this task. Whilst, thankfully, many members were more than willing to contribute in some way, I detected an undercurrent of "what has the union ever done for me?" Whilst, to a certain extent, I initially had some sympathy for their views I prefer to pursue a more positive path.

The Collins English Dictionary offers the following meaning for the word union "... An association, alliance, common purpose..."

No argument there. A common purpose. We are all members of this union because

we have a passionate interest in Tai Chi and, presumably, hope that we can mutually benefit by sharing our skills and opinions. It is only through involvement of its members that can unions survive and spread their message. The message we have is very much worth spreading, so let's shout from the rooftops and let everyone benefit from the fruits of this wonderful art!

Be active in your union and participate in the newsletter. Write about recent experiences, any books you have read, workshops you've attended. The magazine is for your benefit and we need your help to continue!

Interview with

DAN DOCHERTY



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

1974. It made more sense than karate which I had trained for 3 years. Also I had decided to become a full time martial arts teacher and there were too many karate teachers.

What does the art mean to you?

Despite being diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2010, I still practice every day. I like writing about it and most of my latest book 'Wild Colonial Boy' is about my Tai Chi experiences.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

The TCUGB was inaugurated in 1991. In 1990 Nigel Sutton approached Gary Wragg, Linda Broda, John Hine, Paul Crompton. Ian Cameron et al; we all had some input. I have a law degree and had drawn up the constitution of the Hong Kong Tai Chi Association. I had the executive committee experience from Hong Kong so I thought I could be useful.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

People are lacking in time, energy and physicality so they switch to qigong.

In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

The growth of the internet and a 'get it now, no real effort' mindset.

What are your views on the current level of taichi/qigong?

Mixed.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

Care homes.

Any other thoughts?

The TCUGB has been a force for good. Let us keep it that way.



Professor Chang Man-Ching

A LATE NIGHT CHAT WITH THE MAIN MAN

BY LINDA CHASE BRODA | ISSUE 2, SPRING/SUMMER 1994

Linda Chase Broda was an early advocate of the Tai Chi Union, being actively involved in teaching and writing, her other calling was as a poet. Linda was born on Long Island, New York. She began her studies of Tai Chi Chuan with Sandy Cuthbert in 1974 followed by several other teachers in both Yang and Wu styles. She moved to Manchester in 1980 and set up the Village Hall Tai Chi school as well as teaching locally in other venues. In 2000 she formed the Tai Chi Forum for Health, training Tai Chi teachers to work with students with a variety of health needs. Sadly, Linda passed away in 2011 but continues to be inspiration in both Tai Chi and poetry.

Remember Lawrence Galante? He was one of your students in New York. He still lives there and teaches Tai Chi. He came over to Britain a while ago, invited by a group of us, to teach. Picture it, Lawrence, Larry Butler, Ronnie Robinson, Bob Lowey, Doris Hoften and I sat together in a restaurant in Glasgow and talk to animatedly about -wait for it -our computers. To be accurate, Doris listened while the rest of us talked about software graphics programs. I think you would've enjoyed it a lot, actually. Good food, good spirits and good company. We talked about Tai Chi too, but the fresh fascination we all had with the potential of the technology available to us inspired a very lively segment of our conversation. Publicity, database, graphics and bookkeeping. We've also talked about the video some of us had made, were making, had seen and hoped to see. We talked about travel, people in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and the US – Some of whom we knew personally and some of whom we knew only from their videos. You knew all the old guys. It was a happy occasion, there seemed to be nothing we couldn't know about the various Yang style tai chi forms, or at least, we could know what they all looked like. And oyster feast, metaphorically speaking.

For instance, I certainly know what your form looks like. How many times have I had you on pause, rewind, fast forward and play? As an old man and a young man, in a white tunic or a black tunic. Smiling or frowning, and taking those deep steps in before the big bushes. Sometimes, when it's late at night, and if it's just the two of us, like tonight, I love to have these little conversations with you. Well monologues actually. I talk and you don't, but I pretend that you listen. Anyway, I like to let you get on about your business. (Carry-on. Roll back, press, separate, push.)

Funny, isn't it Professor, you and me spending all this time together? Did you know, I always refer to you as my main man? It's not just to flatter you, but to make sure you realise that you're not the only one. For instance, recently I've been studying with one of the top students of one of your top students. The American, Aarvo Tucker, who's a senior student of Mr. Liu Hsi-heng in Taipei I haven't met Mr. Liu yet, but I hope to visit him later this year. I know he was one of your favourites.

That reminds me, Aarvo told us a story about you and Mr. Liu. You called him to come round to your house to see you because you had something very important to tell him. When he arrived, he knocked on your screen door. You were inside and obviously had heard him, but you didn't answer. He could see you. You were reading through the proofs of your book (the one you had written with Robert Smith) at the same time you were moving your weight forward and back and doing your magic little hip trick turns which you always had hid under your shirt on all the films. You just kept on reading and moving forward and back while poor Mr. Liu stood outside, not knowing whether to knock again or just wait. Eventually, you spoke. "It's all contained in this. This is the key to everything in Tai Chi." I think you were pretty pleased with yourself.

I learned a lot about you from that story – something of your arrogance, your impatience with less than perfection, your recognition of your own talent and your total dedication to the supreme ultimate aspect of Tai Chi. I wondered how many hours you spent doing that exercise. I felt ashamed of my own fickleness – getting bored after ten minutes of almost any exercise I can think of. You were in the business of discovery, of creating understanding and trying to trans-

mit it. But did you, I wonder? Aarvo said that Mr. Liu went on to make that hip turning exercise into his main complementary practice for his Tai Chi form and pushing hands. Did you want him to do that? I know from some of your other students that you weren't very keen on warm up exercises in general. The form seemed to be all that was needed. And as for pushing hands, announcements of theories or directions on how to practice were pretty useless. Only touch and feel could begin to get the message across, but not everyone got it. I know they didn't.

Where did you get it? Robert Smith says in one of his books that you only faught with your teacher, Yang Ch'eng-fu, twice and that both times he sent you flying. Smith speculates that your skill came in part from the other senior students and also from learning techniques from all the people who challenged you. You said it came from Yang Ch'eng-fu and from always sticking to the basic principles of relax & sink. When people ask you why none of your students approached the level of your skill, you said, "No faith." "Faith in what?" Smith asked you. "Faith in the twin principles of relax & sink, in not resisting and always remaining gently attached to the opponent... Never put more than four ounces of pressure on your opponent and never let him put more than four ounces on you. If this is followed, mastery will come. If you follow it."

How many times have I read these words and thought about them? But, when I'm pushing hands, I often forget. Four ounces quickly escalates to twenty. Yet you describe it in such playful language - a bit like 'take an aspirin and go to bed'. Or 'lose the self and follow' or 'place a foot on each thigh' or 'I have no preferences' or 'be here now.' The instructions are deceptively easy and so too is the eventual accomplishment of the instructions. The hell is all the stuff in between which one might do instead. I try and remember, but I forget. Simplicity coupled with faith. Not technique alone, but an implied suspension of reality which allows a leap into the unknown. Oh, yes. I suspected something like that.

I'm so curious about you. I try not to take too seriously the slacking off you get about your drinking. Ok, you drank a lot. I'm not interested in that. I think that now I am most interested in you as a painter and as a poet, probably because I know very little about those parts of your life. I know that you taught painting (Chinese water colour) at the University of Peking and then later in Taiwan. I think I've read a translation of a poem or two, but I can't really remember them. Recently, when Alan Pittman visited, he told me



Cover photo from *There are No Secrets*
by Wolfe Lowenthal

some things Robert Smith told him about you. (Alan had been Mr. Smith's student in Georgia for a long time) Smith spoke of how you straddled various social groups. There were martial artists, who are not particularly sophisticated and the academics, who were very conventional, but the people you liked the most were outside both these groups. They were the misfits, the unconventional ones, the eccentrics. Ah, I thought at that time, in another restaurant, this time in Manchester. That fits very well and my view of you; someone living close to the edge, a bit fed up with how things are and looking for new interpretations, not needing to tow the line or seek approval

This year, I'm finally going to take a trip to the Orient, mostly because of you. I want to get a better handle on who you really were. I'll go to Taiwan and see where you lived. I'll go to that park with the palm trees in it which I've seen so often in the video, waving in more than one direction and at more than one speed as I fast forward and rewind you. But my immediate purpose will be to meet Mr. Liu and invite him to come to the UK. Do you think he'll want to come? After all, he's the one who stayed home to mind the store for you. He didn't venture out and ride the bandwagon of your success. Do you realize, he's in his late 70s now? I hope he may still want to travel.

You're probably laughing at me, chalking them up - Ben Lo, William Chen, Lawrence Galante. I even met Ed Young once in Edinburgh. In fact, it was he who first showed a 16mm film of you to a group of us. I wasn't very impressed, actually, though I thought I should be. At the time, nearly twenty years ago, I didn't know what I was

looking at. It looked too simple and it seemed that Robert Smith was setting up the whole thing to make you look terribly clever. He probably was. It doesn't matter now. I made you into a hero anyway. Before I saw the film, you were just a name. After I saw the film, you were the ultimate goal, though I didn't even know the particular Yang style form that you did. I learned about it ten years later. It was several years after that, before I had my own video of you, which I could watch to my heart's content, the way I'm doing now. (Snake creeps down, golden rooster one, rooster other.)

I wonder what you would really think of me, of my students, of my colleagues, analysing every breath you took, every step you made and every turn of your palm. When we've done that for a while, then we compare what you did with what your students do and when we exhaust ourselves with that, we compare your movements from your younger renditions of the form with your movements in the older renditions. And when we tire of that, sometimes we practice. (By the way, I've never been able to see absolutely clearly if you really do keep your feet parallel in the monkey. The left one looks pretty straight, but I'm not sure about the right one.)

Did I tell you? Recently I went to a Bob Dylan Society monthly meeting in a pub. Funny to think that you were in New York at the same time he was playing in Greenwich Village coffee houses in New York. Maybe you went to see him. I know that your American hosts were pretty bohemian in their tastes. They would've liked Bob. This particular gathering was in Manchester, England, last month. I went because I was reading from a new poetry anthology about Dylan. I had written one of the poems. (I told you already that you were not my only man.) I recognized the flavour of the gathering immediately. The people assembled were just another bunch of fanatics, paying excruciatingly close attention to their main man. Admittedly, they had more material to work with, better tunes and also a bit of uncertainty since their main man is still alive. But, all in all, it was the same stuff. "What did he do, and when, and how was it, and was it the same the next time he did it, etc.?" We, who might be in the Cheng Man-Ch'ing Society, if ever there were to be such

a thing, had to keep on thrashing around in the same old Yang form again and again. What do you think? Will we learn anymore, any deeper or any better? Or is the show so far, all there is?

Professor, I wish you'd stop those interminable single whips and talk to me. It's a little pathetic, answering my own questions, even though I know what the answer is. I know you'd feel that so much examination and comparison is silly. It's against the way of things. It contravenes the law of change. Tai chi has lost its creative edge as an art form and has become bogged down in details, petty disputes and internal rivalries. Mystery, individuality, talent and innovation have been replaced with technical expertise, academic correctness and intellectual justification, all supported by the inflated egos of the exponents.

That's the truth, isn't it? Tell me, Professor, if you were a young man now, would you take up Tai Chi as a method of discovering and expressing your own interpretation of power, of energy, of health, of art? No. I don't think you would. Too much is already known about too many styles and too many people who have too much technique and no real potential connection with you. You would be told everything about everything there was to know about Tai Chi. How you should feel, where to put your feet, and how to send energy to the tip of your left index fingernail. You would have diagrams, (from our own book, of course) and videos and teachers who had been to every other great teacher in the world. They would be only too happy to tell you who all those teachers were. They would have CVs already prepared, listing every course they had ever attended with any teacher who had a world-wide reputation. They would forget the names of their first teachers. They would be principles and actions from the lives of people they didn't know, who came from places they've never been. You would be their student. You would be trying to replicate truth.

You were a master of the five excellences: painting, calligraphy, medicine, poetry and Tai Chi. I wish I had a video of you painting, or a cassette of your voice reading your poems. If I had these, I would like each of them only once.

Interview with

MARK PETERS



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I dabbled a bit with tai chi and other martial arts in the 1980's when I attended a few Aikido classes at a local community centre. I really enjoyed them (who doesn't love Steven Segal) but wanted something my wife could also be involved with and due to her bad back, we had to rule this out. Next I tried 'Kung Fu' only to find the teacher wasn't actually that good and had combined a little Karate and Wing Chun.

Disheartened, I looked everywhere I could think, even night school classes. Never really fancied Karate and that seemed to be all that was on offer at the time.... It wasn't until I read Danny Conner's Tai Chi book that I started felt I'd found what I was looking for. As Yang Cheng Fu said "Not all Tai Chi is the real Tai Chi"; I was amazed at what was out there purporting to be this wondrous art I was looking for. Of all the schools I investigated, only a handful came close. I even gave a couple a go but they all fell short of the mark for me. I eventually found Nigel Sutton's Zhong Ding school and felt I had come home.

What inspired you to start?

Like many growing up in the 70's it was old dubbed kung fu movies, and David Carradine in the 'Kung Fu' series (1972). David was a stark

contrast to the hard fighting in the films, he seemed graceful, peaceful and inspiring. Reading Danny's book is what really inspired me into a serious search for a quality teacher. No more dabbling for me...

What does the art mean to you?

Initially it was a softer, more holistic, approach to martial arts and spiritual development. As a young engineer I could see that it was fundamentally 'human engineering'. In more recent years I see it as a muscular-skeletal rehabilitation system, but more than just the mechanics of it, integration of the mind too. I'm still true to its martial routes, form without function is no form at all.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain?

As my then teacher, Nigel Sutton, was one of the founding members and proposed the original idea to Dan Docherty in Taiwan, I joined at the very beginning and was probably one of the first student-members in 1991.

When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

Around 2010 I think. I believed in the original aims and values of the TCUGB when it was formed. I wanted to become more involved so I could help it continue to develop.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years?

When I first started it was rare to find people teaching the whole art; it was mostly just a feel-good exercise and I remember even being told "your legs shouldn't ache, this is a gentle art".

Through the 90's I competed in the UK and internationally and met more students and teachers practicing different styles of tai chi, qigong and internal martial arts. I feel those were the best years.

In the 2000's more and more people were becoming YouTube masters and seemed to make little effort to train in depth. Qigong become more and more popular with many systems popping up giving instant mastery. As mindfulness became a trend in recent years, even more qigong weekend-masters have appeared. This seems to have had two main effects (1) an increased awareness

for the general public as its featured on so many TV shows and in movies (2) a drop in quality control on mass. Don't get me wrong, there are many excellent teachers out there, but how do the general public know? Where do they check?

In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

The growth of the internet and a 'get it now, no real effort' mindset.

The internet influence has not been all negative. In the past we were lucky if we got to see old, poor quality copies of videos of old masters and maybe read a few of the available books. Now, the original recordings have been made available on YouTube and other sites, more old texts have been translated and easier to obtain. We're in interesting times.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

Everyone is a master. How many tai chi masters does it take to change a light bulb? 10, 1 to change it slowly and 9 to say they would have

done it differently and are more qualified to do it.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

The TCUGB was originally formed to bring quality practitioners together and to introduce the arts to the general public with greater quality control. We need to build a better profile and public awareness to get the quality level up again on mass. Projects such as the CIMSPA tai chi qigong national standard will focus on developing a quality standard in the sector of sports, well-being and rehabilitation.

Any other thoughts?

When I trained in Asia, my teachers often gave me a banner and they always said the same thing "martial arts are one family." As the TCUGB becomes more inclusive of genuine styles of tai chi, qigong and internal martial arts we can grow from strength to strength. We are now "the Tai Chi & Qigong Union for Great Britain" to better reflect our membership.



Why practice Tai Chi Chuan slowly?

BY VINCENT CHU | ISSUE 8, SPRING/SUMMER 1997

Almost from the beginning, the Journal had an international feel. Tai chi practitioners from around the world were invited to submit articles for publication. In issue number eight from the spring/summer, 1997 we have an article by Vincent Chu, 6th generation lineage holder of Yang style. Master Chu started studying with his father at the Gin Soon Tai Chi Chuan Club in Boston, Massachusetts, where he continues to teach. This article offers a description of why practicing slow is important and one of the unique features of Tai Chi Chuan.

There have been many answers to the question of why Tai Chi Chuan is practiced slowly. One answer says that because all tied to each one movements are circular, it takes a longer path and therefore more time to travel from point A to point B. Another answer says that when slow, the practitioner can pay more attention to the movement. These answers are like the four blind men who wanted to find out what is an elephant.

Tai Chi Chuan is the physical interpretation of the philosophy of Tai Chi. It has Yin and Yang components. Tai Chi Chuan is composed of Gong - martial training, and Chee – technique training. Gong refers to internal power and Chee refers to martial art.

When one is training in internal power, one practices intent and chi both. Therefore, there is concentration directed on individual movements. When one practices technique one focuses on the Eight Postures (ward off, roll back, press, push, pull down, split, elbow strike and shoulder strike) and the Five Elements (left, right, forward, retreat and center) and the importance of their power, direction and technique.

Although each of the individual Eight Postures is slightly different, they all refer to a strike. Each utilizes the hands, elbows, knees, feet, hips and head. Generally, because the power of these strikes is issued outward by the movement of the body, the Eight Postures actually refer to eight types of body movement. Advance and retreat refers to the movement of the feet or body. Left and right refers to the eye movement. Centre refers to the body technique

Tai Chi Chuan is a martial art and very efficient as such because it applies internal power to each technique. Therefore, when one is practicing Tai Chi Chuan, one is practicing the development of internal power, or what is commonly called Qigong. It is a special kind of Qigong that utilizes

all its movements for martial arts. The skill and power of this Qigong is different from most Qigong practice today. This is why the practice of Tai Chi Chuan yields so many benefits - from both martial arts and Qigong. Like hard Qigong, it can develop the facility for taking a powerful punch to the body. But Tai Chi Chuan practitioners can also take punches, while they are in motion, not only from a stationary posture.

Tai Chi Chuan can also develop the facility of issuing power outside the body to affect other people or to bounce people off with a strike. This power is the result of a combination of yielding jing and fa jing (discharging power). Therefore, it can be said that if one doesn't have this yielding jing and fa jing skill, one doesn't really practice Tai Chi Chuan correctly.

Intent is what is necessary. It is the commander of all movement. It is said in the Six Harmony Theory that when intent is present, Chi is present and power is present. A movement without intent is nothing. Intent without movement is nothing too. Intent combined with movement that is not applied to an opponent is nothing. When intent combined with movement is applied to an opponent, then something is achieved. A beginner who moves from movement to movement without paying attention to each movement's function is not considered to be practicing Tai Chi Chuan.

Tai Chi Chuan is not exclusively slow - other martial arts also have slow forms and Tai Chi Chuan can be practiced fast. The fact is that when one practices Tai Chi Chuan solo form concentrating on intent and power, the speed will be slow - one focuses on the yin or gong component. When one practices Tai Chi Chuan fast, one focuses on the yang or chee component. The Tai Chi Chuan classics state that a practitioner can only master the art when they have mastered both yin and yang.

Interview with

GARY WRAGG

When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I began Tai Chi training in 1973 with Gerda Geddes. On my first lesson with her, she talked about the circle and the square, in Taoism and Tai Chi, and of essential principles, that felt absolutely right, in a total way. It was all the more amazing in relation to a series of paintings that I had been currently working on. So then and there I knew something had clicked, and since then, I have never looked back. The parallels of Tai Chi and painting have been a united way of life for me.

What does the art mean to you?

A decade earlier, in a 60's self portrait, I am standing in the Beginning posture of the Tai Chi form, when I knew absolutely nothing about Tai Chi Chuan.

Tai Chi and the guiding principles, continuing in particular with my later involvement with Wu Family Tai Chi Chuan, all in all, opened a complete integrated way of life, it was a natural development for me.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

Eighteen years on, from my first Tai Chi lesson, in 1991, I became a Founder member of the TCUGB, inspired to help improve the overall awareness and state of Tai Chi in the UK, by helping to more unite the UK Tai Chi community. This was possible in a number of various ways, that eventually did become a reality. Prior to 1991, the main half dozen schools of Tai Chi in the UK were insular and mostly rivals.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

The most significant changes for Tai Chi in the UK have been a major unification, sharing and exchanges of stylistic methods, information and emphasis, particularly through workshops, competitions, demonstrations, national and international interaction. Gradually, practitioners would have the opportunity to acquire a better perspective and awareness of what they practiced and

also what others practiced, which when it comes to Judging in a Tai Chi competition, is essential. My Judging Seminar Workshops began in 2005.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

The current level of Tai Chi and Qi Gong players and schools is higher now than it ever was in the UK.

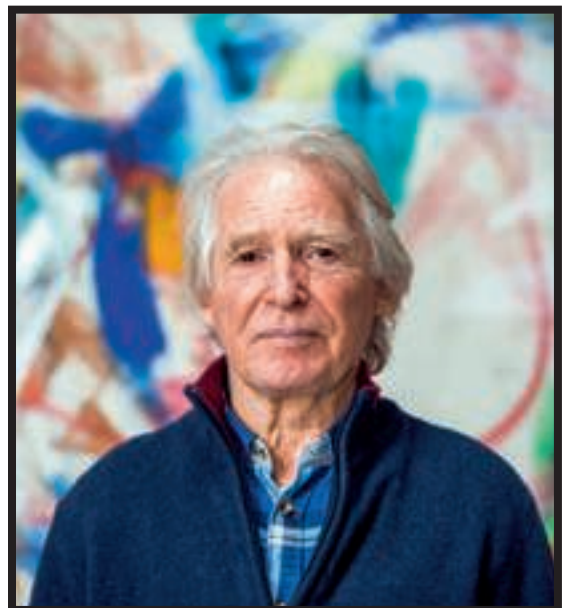
Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I would like to see Tai Chi and Qi Gong instructors pursue the best in humanitarian qualities, like kindness and goodwill, especially by those in powerful positions. Help bring out the best in instructors to improve students practice. World wide, to help improve physical, mental emotional and spiritual states of health and well-being. Many small steps to lead to leaps!!

Any other thoughts?

Speaking personally, for all aspects of Wu Family Tai Chi Chuan, health meditation and self defense, I hope that the natural evolution of all respected traditional styles will continue to be vibrant and to keep on track, maintaining the nature of each art intact, and not get muddled.

Peace of mind, harmony good health and longevity, has always been the aim.



The Essence of Movement

BY IAN CAMERON | ISSUE 10, AUTUMN/WINTER 1998

Ian Cameron was another early practitioner of Tai Chi Chuan having opened the Five Winds School in Edinburgh in the 1970s. Ian began his training in Hong Kong in the early 70s and found his teacher, Cheng Tin Hung almost immediately. He never turned back once he began his study. 'The Essence of Movement', appearing in issue 10 of the Journal, reveals his understanding of the art. It was excellent reading in then and remains so today.

Over a fairly long period of time, something has become of increasing interest to me, is the idea of getting to the essence of movement. Just the movement; not what it is for or how it looks, simply the experience of moving.

It is a very liberating experience to really feel this moment-to-moment action. The slow, fluid movements Tai Chi Chuan are a wonderful medium for moving towards developing this awareness. I think that this can only happen after many years of practice. When you can drop all extraneous ideas, you can clear the way to get in touch with essential movement. There should be nothing but movement, and a relaxed focus on the particular moment/movement. This clears the ground for a wider appreciation of the essence of Tai Chi. The mind is freer. If the mind is occupied with thoughts of the application of each technique, as you go through the form, you'll be caught by that thought. I feel that to be overly attached to these thoughts is to be limited by them. Of course, it is important to understand the martial aspects of Tai Chi Chuan, but don't stay there. If you know them, you know them. It isn't necessary to carry them around. This is a process that we are within and there was a great deal of learning to come through. Eventually we see that this training leads us to a greater sense of freedom in whatever we do.

What I feel tai chi training is ultimately for is the liberation of the individual. Only when we drop all our notions – just to do it, can true spontaneity come forth.

It is a matter of being in the moment with nothing to spare, just the essence. The mind is not more capable of responding to any situation. This is carried through in every aspect of Tai Chi. We continue the pairing down of everything to the simplest expression. That expression is the totality of the body and mind in harmony, giving us the physical and mental focus needed for good Tai Chi. Everything is full but at the same time

empty and fluid, always changing but alive with never ending potential.

When the body moves, it must move as one unit, from the ground to the fingertips. The same is true in every aspect of Tai Chi. For example, when using a sword, any movement of the body is reflected in the weapon. The soft connection of the hand, between you and the weapon makes this possible. The very fluid and subtle movements are more likely to be achieved when the body is relaxed and sensitive. Although each weapon has its own expression, the coordination is the same. It is important to get yourself out of the way and not overly try to influence the weapon. Holding a weapon too tight is the same as choking the life out of it.

If too much emphasis is placed on application, there is a danger of sacrificing the aesthetic of the forms. I believe a great deal is lost if this is the case.

Why not have both? I always believe in quality of movement. If you have this in the application it will be all the more effective. The whole body must be used to transfer energy through to the very tip of the weapon. Staying with the sword as an example, it is a very refined weapon. It should be performed lightly and smoothly. This form should resemble the weaving of the dragon and the movement of undulating waves. My teacher said, "Tai Chi should be felt and should not be just a technical exercise."

It is opening up a space that allows you to move freely and become much more in touch with the essence of your movement. Being acutely aware of your movements, you can see how your whole body is coordinated. Through the sensitivity of the body, you are acutely aware of the smallest movement. My main focus now is to distill everything down to its most essential and not burdening practice with anything other than the art itself.

Interview with

PETER BALLAM

When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

Back in the early 1980's, I used to train regularly at my local gym but once I passed 30 years of age I realised I was taking longer to recover from minor injuries and what I was doing was probably not sustainable long term, so I started looking for a form of exercise that was a little more mentally challenging and could be adapted as I grew older. I had read some articles about Tai Chi Chuan and it appealed to me as a low impact and "kinder" form of exercise. The first classes I attended were evening classes run by the adult education authority but the teacher had limited knowledge and the course did not run beyond the first term, however it did introduce me to art. In those prehistoric (well pre-Google) times life was much simpler as there were fewer teachers around and no internet! I found a class in London, I believe it may have been one of John Hines groups. When I visited I realised that the travelling involved would not make it viable with my work and other commitments. I then discovered that Nigel Sutton ran classes down on the south coast but by the time I tracked those down Nigel had moved on. I kept looking and eventually I saw an article in a local paper about Ian McMillan who was running classes at the King Alfred Centre in Hove. I joined those classes and found a whole new world, Tai Chi Chuan as a martial art.

In 1986 a number of students from Hove attended workshops in London arranged by Ian Cameron and Dan Docherty when they hosted Cheng Tin Hung from Hong Kong. When Cheng Tin Hung returned to the UK in 1987, Dan, Tong Chi Kin, and Cheng ran a workshop at the King Alfred Centre. I was hooked and this is the style I have practised ever since.

What does the art mean to you?

To me, tai chi chuan is a no nonsense martial art that incorporates elements of training that are also beneficial for physical and mental health and can be practised on many levels depending upon a person's age, health and desired outcome. You get out of tai chi chuan what you are prepared to invest, there is no magic or secrets, just training.

If you are lucky, you get to train with people you like and can share a beer and a laugh, after all why would you do it if it isn't fun!

Over the years I have made many good friends through our mutual enjoyment of tai chi chuan. I will always be grateful for the opportunity it has given me to visit interesting countries and try to punch complete strangers!

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

This question prompted me to go hunting in my archives. I found my original certificate of membership which is numbered 36 and dated May 1992, so I guess I must have been among the earliest members. I joined the Committee in 2010, I am still working on my exit strategy! I liked the idea that Tai Chi practitioners could come together as a community.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years?

Obviously there has been a massive increase in the interest in tai chi chuan and qigong and the numbers of people teaching. There is much less emphasis on tai chi chuan being taught as a martial art and it has become more commercially focused with sessions being offered at corporate events etc.

In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

The differences between tai chi chuan and qigong has become confused. For example, I regularly receive requests asking how someone can become a tai chi instructor, as if this is something that can be done by attending a short course. Personally, I do not like this blurring of the arts, it is unfortunate that the "Chi" in tai chi chuan and the "Qi" in qigong are often pronounced the same giving the impression it has the same meaning and so the arts must also be the same thing!

The internet is a mixed blessing as now anyone can find a daunting number of teachers etc., but there is no quality control on who is providing the information. It is good that the Tai Chi and Qigong Union for Great Britain is working with

CIMSPA and others to develop a programme that will assist the public in locating teachers that can deliver a certain standard.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

I cannot comment on qigong, as I have very limited experience of these arts/systems. I welcome the fact that tai chi chuan is now more widely available and there is much more information and research around the history and lineage of styles as that helps dispel some of the myths and mystery around the art. Although you can still enjoy a good tale about the origin of the art as long as you realize it is probably just a story!

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I would like to see tai chi chuan and qigong reclaim their own identities and dispell the current confusion. They are both a good form of exercise

and in the case of tai chi chuan, an effective martial art for those seeking and prepared to commit to the training. I recall another instructor, who unfortunately is no longer with us, Joanna Zorya being asked the same question. Her answer was a bit more direct: "More fighting, less fluff."

Any other thoughts?

I think of tai chi chuan and qigong a bit like football or cricket. We would be laughed at if we were to suggest that, as the inventors, only the English know how to play these games, so although tai chi chuan and qigong practices originated in China they now belong to the whole world. There are many excellent teachers in other countries, we need to be acknowledging and promoting them. A fair share of these teachers are members of the Tai Chi Union so are available and active in this country.



Tai Chi for Health

AS AN AID TO ARTHRITIS

BY DR. PAUL LAM | ISSUE 14, AUTUMN 2001

Dr. Paul Lam, a family physician in Australia for 26 years, he is a respected Tai Chi teacher. Dr. Lam has created several Tai Chi programs that have helped to improve people's health and lifestyle. Over the past several years, Dr. Lam has been conducting workshops with a Tai Chi arthritis program worldwide.

Introduction

Some tai chi practitioners argue about what is more important, martial arts or health. I believe this does not matter so much because to be good at either purpose we need to train the same components. To be effective in martial arts, you need to have a clear mind to assess the situation calmly, a strong stance and good balance. You also need to understand the principles of yielding and advancing at the right time. You need to be strong from within, have strong qi and you need to be fitter and have stronger muscles, etc. The same components are essential for better health, calmer mind, understanding the principle of balance, understanding the idea of yielding and advancing.

Historical background

Yang Lu-Chan changed the original Chen style Tai Chi Chuan into Yang style. Yang style has higher stances, is slow, gentle and graceful. It has eliminated the more difficult, fast and forceful delivering movements; punching, jumping in the air, of the original Chen style. For whatever reason, Yang Lu-Chan changed the Tai Chi Chuan from an exclusively martial arts practice to one dedicated to a great health exercise. Since Yang style was created, the other styles such as Wu, Hao and Sun styles, followed suit in that they are all similar in terms of being gentle, relaxing and suitable for most people to learn for health. Naturally, all styles are still retaining their martial art disciples, but these styles are also more suitable for health purposes only.

The fact that Tai Chi is so popular is largely due to the health aspect. In my experience 99% of practitioners and students are practicing Tai Chi for health purposes. So, for whatever reason we're practicing Tai Chi, we don't need to practice it any differently for health or martial arts except for serious martial art purposes, sparring is regarded as essential by many. But sparring can carry a higher chance of injury risk.

I also believe that the more people practice tai

chi, the more it will improve the general level of proficiency, knowledge and depth of the art. For example, years ago, basketball was not so popular, the huge popularity improves its techniques and skill immensely. I believe this can happen with Tai Chi. The future of Tai Chi in the 21st-century could rely on its almost magical ability to improve health.

How does it work for health?

Most experts agree that a good exercise program should contain three components. They are flexibility or range of motion, muscular strengthening and fitness. There are many scientific studies that have proven Tai Chi improves all these. For example, the *Atlanta FAICSIT group (reducing frailty and falls in older persons: an investigation of tai chi and computerized balance training*. J Am Geriat Soc. 1996 May; 44 (5):489-97.) conducted an exciting study using a prospective, randomized, controlled clinical trial which is considered the gold standard of medical research methods. The study evaluated the effects of two exercise approaches, Tai Chi (TC), and computerized balance training (BT) and looked at biomedical aspects (strength, flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, body composition), functional components, psychosocial indicators of frailty and the occurrence of falls. The results indicated that TC intervention could impact favorably on defined biomedical and psychosocial indices of frailty (muscular strength, flexibility and balance), as well as a massive 47.5% decrease upon the occurrence of falls.

Apart from these three essential components, Tai Chi has many other positive effects on the body:

Better posture: Many doctors believe that correct body posture will less inappropriate wear to joints and muscles. When your posture is upright, the long space is larger (try to take a big breath and straighten your chest, you will notice there is more space in the chest). The body functions better in an upright posture.

A stooped body and drooping shoulders often associate with sadness, fear and negative emotion. Try to assume such a posture and you will most likely start having negative feelings. Whereas in an upright, powerful but supple posture, you will find it difficult to be depressed and negative. Right posture leads to positive feeling or positive mental state that can, in turn, improve physical body.



throughout the body, performing many functions to maintain good health. The stronger your qi, the healthier and stronger you are.

The concept of qi has been a basic belief in most Eastern cultures for thousands of years. Acupuncture and Chinese medicine base their central theory on this concept. The word gong means an exercise that requires a great

The power of the mind: There are many studies demonstrating the amazing power of the mind controlling the body. Tai Chi integrates body and mind, using conscious mind to direct the internal force and the internal force to direct each movement. When practicing Tai Chi one focuses on all movements and the coordination of the body. The mental training in Tai Chi will enhance clarity of the mind, improve relaxation and uplift the mood. A recent review done by doctors from Stanford University (Luskin,FM, Newall, KA, Griffith, M, et al.(1998). 'A review of mind-body therapies in the treatment of cardiovascular disease: Part 1. 'Altern Ther. Health Med. May; 4(3) 46-61.) on complementary and alternative treatments concludes that mind-body techniques (including Tai Chi) were found to be efficacious primarily as complementary and sometimes as stand-alone alternative treatments.

Clearly the immense power of the mind has not been fully estimated. As one of the most powerful mind-body exercises, Tai Chi teaches the student to be mindful of the intrinsic energy from which he or she can achieve greater self-control and empowerment.

The power of Chi: In Chinese, qi means several things; the most common meaning of qi is air. Here in the context of Tai Chi, qi is the life energy inside a person. This life energy comes from the combination of three things: the air breathed in through the lungs, essential qi from the kidney and the qi absorbed from food and water through the digestive system. Qi circulates

deal of time to become proficient. Qi gong is the practice to cultivate qi. Qigong is essentially a breathing exercise sometimes aided by certain body movements and meditation at the same time. Tai Chi is also called meditation in motion having incorporating qigong as an integral component. The gentle and slow movements stretch one's energy channels and keep them strong and supple; the rhythmic movements of the muscle, spine and joints pumps energy through the whole body. Tai Chi is one of the most effective exercises for qi cultivation.

There are many reasons Tai Chi works so well in promoting health and fitness. It is a pleasurable exercise that is almost addictive, it is cheap to learn and you don't need any expensive equipment. You can practice Tai Chi almost anywhere. It has so much depth and diversity that almost anyone can find a form or style that suit him or her.

A specially designed program –'Tai Chi for Arthritis'

A designed program has many advantages, 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' is simple, easy to learn and yet it is powerfully effective in healing arthritis. It is also safe if practiced properly. I worked with a group of rheumatologists (arthritis specialists) and Tai Chi instructors to compose the 12-movement program based on Sun style. It is officially endorsed by the Arthritis Foundation of Australia. The program includes exercises for arthritis, warm-up and wind-down exercises, a qigong exercise for relaxation, and three levels of difficulty.

A hermit, a westerner and a motorcyclist...

BY JAN SILBERSTORFF | ISSUE 18, SPRING 2004

Jan Silberstorff has been active in the international tai chi community for years. He spent time living with his teacher, Master Chen Xiaowang, in Australia. Prior to starting his studies with Master Chen, Jan had been training in several different arts including Yang style, Xingyi and Bagua along with several methods of qigong. He stated that once he 'found' Master Chen he was, at last, home and gave up everything else. His travels through China, always challenging, relates his experience visiting a small Buddhist temple and meeting with the caretaker monk.

It was a long dusty dirt road, which continue to lead me from the Daoist Temple, Louguantai to the mountains. The sun stood high in the sky, 37°, not unusual for a summers day in Shaanxi. The Louguantai temple is situated at the foot of the Zhongnon Mountains and is considered to be the place where Laotse left the Doa De Jing.

After spending some days in the monastery, I longed to see the wide-open landscape of the fields and mountains that are the familiar rural settings of China, far away from the busy, hustling towns. In the distance I could see the Buddhist pagoda where I was heading. It is believed that during the 7th century the Christian Niestorian sect had established a church at the site. The countryside was similar to what I had known in Chenjiagou village; very simple, quiet and still. I passed several smallholdings, a village school and even a small Wushu school, all of which had buildings which had been fashioned from the local clay. There was no difference to the ground on the inside of these buildings, just the simple soil of the earth. Inside simple wooden structures, which were their beds, could also be seen. The black soot indicated where their kitchens were. The area reminded me of my first trips to China in the late 80s when I had lived in similar surroundings. The only source of water was the village well. I was always soaked in sweat but much appreciative of the quietness. The people were never obviously happy nor unhappy; they just were. The old people sat on small stools outside their doors, watching the children play; the youngest around three, the oldest one over 80. When they saw me, their expressions initially stiffened but when I spoke to them in Chinese

they immediately smiled widely. They invited me to sit and have some tea, but I wanted to move as my intention was to walk through the countryside, across the open field and visit the pagoda.

After walking for some time, I realized that the pagoda was further away than I had imagined. Just as I was thinking of turning back a motorcyclist appeared with a large dust cloud behind him. Noisy vehicles are very common in rural China and this was the very first sound to break the silence of my day. The driver offered me a lift; not asking where I was from or where I wanted to go as there was only this long, single track road.

When we arrived at the pagoda, I asked him to stop. Not another living soul could be seen. The Buddhist pagoda was situated in the open, surrounded by the wide corn fields and small farmsteads. The curtain at the entrance was thrown back and an old Buddhist monk, in full robe, suddenly stood before me. He spoke to me, but due to his strong rural dialect, I had difficulty understanding him. I became aware of his near empty mouth which had only a few teeth left. Slowly, I became accustomed to his accent and understood that he was inviting me to ignite some joss sticks. We went into his dark clay hut, which held only a small bed, a few bits n' pieces and a small altar containing a picture of Buddha. I lit the joss-sticks and paid my respects whilst, at the same time, he struck a small bell.

The motorcyclist told me that he was the only monk in this area and that he was the only student of an old Daoist nun who recently died at the age of 116. She had lived in the pagoda since she was 11 years old, caring for the pagoda. In the many decades she stayed there her only student

was the old monk, who had been with her for over 30 years. I looked around the room and realized there were no golden trinkets, no large icons and no postcard salesmen – only the clay hut, the pagoda and the old man. When I asked about his teacher, he took out a small glass picture frame.

That night I lay awake for quite some time, unable to get the monk out of my head. On the next morning I needed to visit him once more to say goodbye. This time I walked the entire distance on foot. On arrival, the monk came out to see me. With a radiant smile, he told me that the mo-



Even with the bright sunlight through the door I strained to see anything in the frame. When the monk removed several millimeters of dust with a cloth a photo of a very old nun appeared.

One normally makes a small donation for the temple, but I had only 50 Yuan note (approx. £5) and 5 Yuan is the usual amount to give. After a few minutes of searching; in his robe, in some jam jars, under a booklet, and behind the joss-sticks, he could only come up with 10 Yuan in change around 40 small banknotes. In expressing my thanks, I suggested that he should just hold on to the rest of the money. He insisted on continuing his search for more money but after my persistence he finally agreed to keep the money. We then went outside to say our goodbyes and I made my way back to Louguantai.

torcyclist had already called there that morning. He came with enough change to allow him to give back the money you over paid, so he could return it to you, as per your request. I looked surprisingly at him and explained that I had no such arrangement with the motorcyclist, as I intended for him (the monk) to keep the money. “You didn’t say anything like that to him?” the monk asked. “Nothing,” I replied, “I never spoke to him.”

We both silently looked over the sprawling cornfields to the mountains in the distance. The sun was as hot as yesterday. After some time he returned to his hut and a day later I returned home to Germany.

A hermit, a westerner and a motorcyclist; two connected hearts and a pocket full of money...

Interview with

SHELAGH GRANPIERRE



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I started in London, 1973. The philosophy and physical artistry drew me in. Started with my first teacher during the Bruce Lee era.

What does the art mean to you?

It's a way of life, an anchor that underpins everything in my life.

When did you become a member of the

Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

I first become a member in the late 90's and a member of the executive Board in early 2000. I felt that with my long experience in the art I could make a contribution and to the technical panel.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years?

With the rise of the computer/smart phone centred lifestyle, people in general are less co-ordinated and less able to concentrate in the long term. The recent rise of QiGong in all its varieties would seem to be more accessible and suitable for life in the 21st century.

What are your views on the current level of taichi/qigong?

In the west, we have both high-level exponents and teachers of the arts and others with different standards and conduct. There is good in all, even at the basic level.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

Schools and Colleges.



Dan Docherty

AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF TAI CHI

INTERVIEWED BY RONNIE ROBINSON | ISSUE 19

It would be surprising if any members of the Tai Chi Union don't know Dan Docherty. This interview with Dan, unlike the one found earlier, took place in 2004. Dan was interviewed Ronnie Robinson, the first editor of the Journal. Dan's influence on Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong throughout the United Kingdom and Europe has been and remains truly important and, no doubt, changed the public perception of the art. The interview offers many interesting insights into Dan's thoughts, his entry into the martial arts, specifically Tai Chi and as a founding member of the Tai chi Union for Great Britain.

When did you begin your Tai Chi training and what attracted you to the art?

I've studied karate since 1971, achieving a first dan. I read a lot about taijiquan and found it very intriguing. I also met some French karate practitioners who knew a little taijiquan and this led me to read more about the art. Although most of the books available were full of great stories about the incredible feats performed by the great masters, the self-defense techniques illustrated, and the explanations given, did seem incredibly ineffective. I wanted to find out more and had a couple of lessons from a dancer in Glasgow but, of course, she had no idea how to apply the self-defense techniques and I couldn't figure it out from the book.

Where did you go from there?

At that point in time (1975) there was no opportunity to learn Chinese internal arts in Scotland and I realized that I would have to travel east to find out more. I graduated from Glasgow University with a law degree but was more interested in martial arts than a legal career. This led me to join the Royal Hong Kong police.

Was it easy to find what you were looking for in Hong Kong?

There were many things on offer, but it was difficult to find someone who had both good character and a high level of ability in martial arts. I tried Goju Ryu and Wing Chun, but didn't feel either of these systems were right for me. The chief physical training instructor at the police training school was a high-level Aikido practitioner and he told me he learned some fighting taijiquan with a certain Sifu Cheng Tin Hung in Kowloon.

How was your first encounter with the man and his art?

He was very cordial, very polite, but very alert. As he had no English and my Cantonese at the time was very limited, he spoke through an interpreter. He took us up to the rooftop where his students were training. No grades,

no uniforms; all practicing different things- weapons, pushing hands, hand form, self-defence techniques- while some were just chatting. Sifu Cheng showed me some self-defence applications from the hand form after which he invited me to hit him as hard as I could in the stomach to demonstrate taiji neigong (internal strength). He absorbed some of my best gyakutsukis (karate reverse punches) with no sign of tension or pain. It was then that I began to suspect I had found the missing link that I mentioned earlier. A week later I had totally given up karate and Wing Chun.

What did your training routine consist of?

A lot of pushing hands, applications and wrestling, the school was very big on Tai Chi wrestling.

Tai Chi wrestling is not commonly known; can you explain a little about it, perhaps how it differs from Western wrestling?

Wrestling is a bit of a misnomer. It comprises shuai jiao, which is mainly throwing, tripping and sweeping; qinna which literally means seizing and holding by using dimmak (pressure points) or to control the opponent using dimmak strikes as for example in Single Whip or again simply to control and restrain the opponent – which was useful in my job as a police officer; finally there is diepu- to make the opponent fall and then follow up with a strike. Of course, the initial contact skill in all of these involves some pushing hand principles.

You worked on these aspects immediately? How about form work?

The emphasis for the “fighters” was on Neigong and fighting, not on form. However, the way of teaching form was quite different from other Yang lineage systems. Firstly, we learned the square form, which was developed by Wu Jian Quan when teaching at Beijing University. There were so many students that they couldn't easily follow so he broke the movements down so they can see clearly were each techniques beginning and ending, after this the regular round form was

taught.

I've heard it said that without a neigong system Tai Chi Chuan is essentially ineffective as a martial art but most practitioners are unfamiliar with this aspect, can you tell me a little about it?

This is generally, but not quite accurately, considered to be a secret side of taijiquan which is only taught after the student has been training for some time and has gone through a ritual ceremony.

We do not use the term Qigong, because qigong tends to suggest that the qi is deliberately directed to different parts of the body; we never try to direct the qi. Instead, we use the term Neigong. Nei means internal and refers to the fact that the 12 yin and 12 yang internal strength exercises are designed to strengthen the body internally by enhancing the function of the internal organs and the qi and blood circulation. Furthermore, they stimulate the central nervous system, forge the will, and make the mind more tranquil.

The internal strengthening process trains the ability of the body to both withstand the blows of the opponent or even to take a jump onto the abdomen from head height and to strike the opponent with jin- focused power. The yin exercises are also particularly effective in improving health and easing cases of insomnia, muscle and bone injuries, nervous tension, etc. The yang exercises are mainly for power. Most of the exercises have a self-defence application.

What is involved in the practice of neigong? I understand that you may not want to actually describe fully what is involved but it would be interesting to know a little about the mechanics of the work.

The exercises tend to be multidimensional; some might focus on enhancing a particular organ, but also stimulate the autonomic and central nervous systems while the application of the movement may involve dimmak. The emphasis is always on correct practice not the breath, and there is the concept of passing through three levels in training, the ultimate one being that of “no me, no you” or “Heaven and Earth and humanity in unity.”

What about the fight training?

We placed heavy emphasis on footwork and evasion when using either striking or grappling techniques. The footwork is largely trained in the “Seven Stars”, “Nine Castles, and dalu pushing hand exercises. The evasion is trained in the fooyang; “four direction, “Chansigong” (railing silk) and “Cailang” (Gather the Wave) pushing hand exercises. I must emphasize pushing hands

is not self-defence but only a method of training skills that are useful in self-defence.

Both Cheng Tin Hung and his student's abilities have been successfully tested in full contact competition and in “duels”. He produced many South East Asian martial arts champions. I am talking now about Tai Chi fighters, training only in Tai Chi Chuan, fighting opponents from other styles of Chinese gongfu, as well as other martial arts. No other Tai Chi master has produced a South East Asian champion.

In 1981, when they were thinking about introducing this type of contest to China, the Chinese authorities invited Cheng Tin Hung to Beijing to advise them on rules, training and holding tournaments. It's also why the Hong Kong government asked Cheng Tin Hung to examine Tai Chi teachers for the government's Tai Chi morning classes.

I have come across many students and teachers of other styles of Tai Chi Chuan

and have found them able to talk good Tai Chi Chuan - stories about their teacher or their teacher's teacher, but when it came down to it they only had rudimentary knowledge of basic pushing hands and self-defence. No internal strength, no evasion, no ability to “fajing”- strike” with focused power. They do not in fact practice Tai Chi Chuan; they practice “Dofuquan” – bean curd boxing. In other words, because they have only and no yang, their fists are like bean curd; soft and soggy.

What other training exercises did you do to make it possible to win the South East Asia Open Weight Martial Championships?

Although internal strength training is the fundamental prerequisite for practicing Tai Chi Chuan as a martial art it is certainly not enough in itself. Once you've trained an ability, you have to learn how and when to use it, so regular practice of the hand form, pushing hands and self-defence techniques is essential.

The essential combat theory of Tai Chi Chuan is to use softness or yin to overcome hardness or yang and use hardness or yang to overcome softness or yin. So rather than blocking the opponent's attacks we divert or redirect them using evasion and/or footwork at the same time. This is using softness to overcome hardness. The attack has then become “dead” force and has changed from yang to yin. At this point we must also change from yin to yang by striking (yang) the vital points of our opponent (yin).

This is using hardness against softness. In order to train this evasion, it is necessary to do a lot of practice on the pushing hands exercises I mentioned earlier.

Aside from the training skills and hard work involved have you ever thought about what it was that made a boy from Glasgow go to China to not only compete but also beat them at their own game?

I don't look at it that way. It is a matter of finding something that you were interested in and then trying to take it somewhere. My master was also something of an outsider and I think that gives you an advantage in terms of not just accepting and given "truths", but making your own truth.

During this time, when you were doing a lot of physical work, how much time did you spend reading or learning about the art? Did your teacher talk much about the philosophical side?

I read books on Tai Chi Chuan even while practicing karate and continue to do so. My teacher, though without a formal education, was a bookworm as I must also confess I am. We both loved books on history and philosophy. I liked the Legalists and the Dialecticians in those days while he preferred the Yijing and Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. He would often talk to us about the links between Tai Chi theory and Chinese thought.

When did you realise that you would make a profession of the art?

Two years before I went to Hong Kong, when I was still doing karate.

So you deliberately study Tai Chi Chuan with a view to making a living from it?

It seemed an agreeable and interesting way to spend my time and certainly beats working for wages though these days there is considerable paperwork with the Tai Chi Union of Great Britain (TCUGB), Taijiquan and Qigong Federation for Europe, etc.

How did you set up your first classes?

I read in a London newspaper that a centre in South London was looking for martial arts teachers, so I went along. It was, in fact, in an old school which had been "occupied" by a group of Afro-Caribbeans, unhappy about the lack of local facilities. The head of the centre, Michael Jacques, had been a boxer and karate man, became my first student. He has now been teaching Tai Chi Chuan professionally for many years.

Did you consciously promote the martial side from the start or did you have many students for the "health" or "personal growth" side?

I figured those areas were already being covered by the competition, and while I was then, and still am, willing to teach all comers, the martial aspect is what I was, and probably am, best known for.

How do you feel about all the different approaches we now see for the art?

Most people don't want Tai Chi Chuan - that is a martial art; they want Qigong, even to the extent that they don't want pushing hands but two person massage Qigong. Now we get business people wanting half hour of "Tai Chi" before a conference. It makes money for teachers and might actually help a little, so fine.

When did you first stage of competition and what prompted you to do so?

Essentially, I did it for publicity and to make money.

Many believe that you do not fit the traditionally expected profile of a taiji master who, for some, is generally considered to be (at least on the outside) calm, serene and extremely gentlemanly in nature. However, being as you are, and holding positions of great responsibility how do you respond to such criticisms.

The "many" and the "some" must live a sheltered life. Cheng Man Ching, a staunch member of the "Kuomintang (Nationalist Party)" for example, was a noted drinker who taught calligraphy and painting to the third wife of Kuomintang leader, Chiang Kai Shek, a former bank robber and member of the Green Gang Triad society, who collaborated with the Japanese and gave his second wife gonorrhea. The former president of Southeast Asian Taiji Association embezzled funds from the association. The president of the International Taijiquan Federation in Taiwan in 1994 presided over cheating at the second Hwa Cup competition that was so blatant that in consultation with fellow coach, Dick Watson, I withdrew the team and I smashed and threw to the ground the present with which we were meant to be placated.

When did you begin to work extensively across Europe and what was it that made you so much in demand in the various countries you taught?

In the late 1980s, there was a gap in the market and a lot of people wanted to do Tai Chi Chuan as a complete art but couldn't find what they were looking for. Epi Van de Pol once called me the "Enfant Terrible" of the European Tai Chi scene and perhaps that was what was needed.

Do you think he made this remark because of his "softer" approach to the art, or because of your "challenging" ways?

Maybe it is a bit of both.

Are there cultural differences in the various countries you teach in with respect to their interests and approaches to the art?

Well, you need to accept that northern

Europeans like the Germans march to the beat of a different drum than Mediterranean people like the Greeks. Hungarians, Russians, and Bulgarian's are all different again, excellent students and I love that part of Europe. I guess it's like the old joke that in heaven the British are the police, the French are the cooks, the Swiss are the bureaucrats, the Germans are the technocrats and the Italians are the lovers, whereas in hell...

Let's look at the political side of things; you were a founder member of the TCUGB and the TCFE, why did you want to create, or be involved in such organizations and what did you see as the purpose of those respective bodies?

The TCUGB was the idea of Nigel Sutton who had his own political agenda, but I knew immediately that based on my experience with the Hong Kong Tai Chi Association that this was the right thing to do as governments and other large bodies prefer to deal with other large bodies rather than a lot of individuals.

As for the TCFE, I have always loved the idea of one Europe and was happy to support our French colleagues, many of whom are now friends and allies in their idea of creating a pan European federation for t Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong. On the practical side, such an organization can help represent our interests with bodies such as the European Union and we can support one another and preserve our independent right to practice our art without interference from China, Taiwan or anywhere else.

I know you're well read and I've spent much time studying Chinese to allow you to get a first hand sense of the material written about internal arts. Have you come across many in accuracies or misunderstandings of the information that has been reported concerning the arts?

I think one of the basic problems is that many of the educated, intelligent people who translated the Tai Chi Chuan Classics and wrote many of the books, though perhaps better linguists than I, didn't know enough about Tai Chi Chuan practice, either in the field of internal alchemy or martial arts, for them to understand or explain correctly what they were writing about. So, everything, whether jin or qi or jing or shen is "energy" and the "dashouge," literally "Hit Hands Song" "is the "Song of Pushing Hands."

You've also traveled extensively in China, visiting many of the places which lay claim to be an influential in the development of the art and its philosophy. Have you made any interesting or startling discoveries as a result

of your travels?

On a simple level, many Westerners practicing Tai Chi Chuan from the Yang lineage believe all practice should be soft and slow. A few years ago, I spent a week on Wudang mountain in December without proper light and heating. It was bloody cold, and I can tell you I did not feel like practicing slowly. Furthermore, when I first visited the mountain in 1984 there were no martial arts schools in the vicinity though we found in an old Taoist who, in return for cigarettes, performed Tai He Quan (Supreme Harmony Boxing). In 2000 I went back and found martial arts schools all over the mountains which teach a hybrid of modern Wushu and kickboxing. In one school the grandmaster who is around 40 years old claimed to be the 14th generation successor of the Zhang San-feng. If we optimistically take one generation as being 25 years, we come up with the date 1650- Zhang had already been dead for more than 200 years.

Again, on visiting the Chen village, the geography was

revealing. As you go along the main road leading through the village, the mansion where Yang Lu-chan lived and practiced is on the left, obscured by high walls and an imposing wooden gate. The road leads to an open area where a training hall of modern construction has been erected.

During good weather Chen stylists practice in the open area and when it rains, they practice indoors. This lends credence to the historian WuTan-nan's arguments that there were two groups in the village, those, like Yang Lu-chan, who practice Tai Chi Chuan, one under Chen Chang-xing behind closed



doors in the mansion and those who continue to practice traditional Chen family Pao Chui in the open. In fact, I believe there must have been three groups if we include the spies in double agents. Also, when I visited in 1995, the old gravestones had been removed from the cemetery and laid face up in the open area. None of them mentioned Tai Chi Chuan. The new gravestones in the cemetery all loaded the Tai Chi Chuan achievement of deceased members of the Chen clan.

Herodotus was called the “Father of History,” but also the “Father of Lies.” Many Chinese martial artists merit the latter rather than the former sobriquet.

Are there any practitioners you would like to meet, either living or dead?

Song Shu Ming is a little-known master who is the secretary to General Yuan Shi Kai. He fetched up in Beijing in the early 1900s, claiming to teach a Tai Chi Chuan from Wudang Mountains, handed down in his family. Wu Tu Nan, the famous historian, wrote that his own master Wu Jian Quan and other famous Beijing masters were so impressed with Song that they studied him and studied with him though they were all well-established teachers. It would be interesting to compare Song's art with what people are doing now.

Are you still in contact with your teacher? If so, what is the nature of your current relationship?

I saw him in September 2004 and he said he had left the Wudang Gate and it was now my world. In many ways and for a long time I was the closest of his students to him in both character and other respects though we had our disagreements and plenty of people tried to poison him against me. Karmic retribution has caught up with most of them.

In the last issue of TCC and IA, we included a brief interview with Eddie Wu, the lineage holder of the Wu system, and he stated that Cheng Tin Hung inherited the family system some years ago, what do you think about the statement?

It is a bit more complicated than that. Cheng Tin Hung's uncle, Cheng Wing Kwong was one of Wu Jian-Chuan's three main Hong Kong disciples, therefore from an early age Cheng Tin-Hung knew the Wu family. He started training with his uncle and when he was 17 he started training with Qi Min-Xuan from Hebei. Qi's father had trained him with Quan You, the father of Wu Jian-Chuan, but Qi also had another master.

On the death of Wu Jian-Chuan, his son,

Wu Gong-Yi took over in Hong Kong. He did not have a great relationship with Cheng as Cheng had once thrown him to the ground when they were pushing hands. Cheng had a good relationship with his uncle but not with the uncle's family. Cheng's attitude was always that he was practicing traditional Tai Chi Chuan so he called it Wudang. In more recent years, he referred to his art as being Cheng “Shi” (style/model) Tai Chi Chuan of the Wu school. However, we do a lot of things differently from the Wu family.

I remember in 1986, when Gary Wragg brought some students to take part in Cheng Tin Hung's London seminars, when we were doing saber form together Gary and his people went one way and we went the other and both parties realized there were differences. Some of the curriculum is different too, for example the internal alchemy taught by Cheng Tin-Hung was not from the Wu family and the spear form is also quite different. I don't believe Cheng Tin-Hung ever saw himself as the head of the Wu style though de facto others may have perceived him as such. As to Cheng Tin-Hung fighters using boxing gloves, Chinese full contact fighting usually requires fighters to use gloves and these can vary in weight from light knuckle protectors which we used in Singapore in 1976, to the four ounce gloves used in Hong Kong contests for many years to the Thai boxing gloves we used in Malaysia in 1980. Tellingly, Cheng Tin-Hung's school was the only Tai Chi Chuan school to compete successfully in the South East Asian Chinese martial arts championships over the course of many years.

On a personal note, I accept that what we do is perceived as being of the Wu school, but I have no interest to do things the way the Wu family now do them though I respect their skills. I also don't except the idea of Cheng style as this then gets identified with the uncle who quite clearly was not a top-level Tai Chi fighter though a capable practitioner. I prefer “Wudang Tai Chi Chuan” or “Practical Tai Chi Chuan,” as martial arts journalist termed Cheng Tin-Hung's art.

Do you see your self as the natural inheritor of your teacher's system?

The great weakness of the famous Tai Chi families is that they and credulous students seem to regard Tai Chi Chuan as a museum exhibit or antique to be passed from one generation to the next rather than as a living art, so that to the extent I don't believe in “inheriting.” Secondly, I think that Cheng Tin-Hung, like many teachers, was not consistently trying to do the same thing. From 1976, he became more involved with the

therapeutic aspects of Tai Chi Chuan by running instructor training classes on behalf of the Hong Kong government Sport and Recreation Department. It ended up that many more people were practicing his system though the number of people who actually knew what they were doing hardly changed.

Thirdly, he didn't put a lot of emphasis on weapon application or self-defense as opposed to fighting (they are not the same). Partly because of my police background and partly out of personal interest, I have developed both these aspects considerably. Furthermore, my teacher had no pedagogic training whereas in the police I was trying to be an instructor and I have found the derivation of many of the names and terms we use in Tai Chi Chuan through my own reading and research rather than through him.

Do you have any views of the shorter 'new forms', some of which have especially been created for competition purposes and others as an aid to assisting various health problems?

This was the great contribution of Cheng Man-Ching and others who followed his lead.

It has made a Tai Chi Chuan accessible for more people, but it is not entirely positive as the traditional Yang lineage long forms follow a definite sequence for practical martial and gymnastic reasons. Martially, some techniques are logical follow ups to what proceeds, while gymnastically the more difficult and demanding movements occur later in the form.

You have probably seen a number of changes in the art over the years; how they are taught and depicted in the media, how things like competitions and other gatherings have played a part in the promotion and ultimate understanding of how things now are, compared to how they were taught when you first began training. Are there any surprises for you anymore?

Though I did compete and some of my students compete and though I run competitions, I don't like them. However, they can be a test under pressure of a student's character and technique. Furthermore, I think people realize that to do well in competitions they can't always expect to get away with practicing for an hour in class once a week.

Competitions are also a test for teachers, both as coaches of competent competitors but also as judges to identify what is good and not so good about the technique of competitors. Also, it is a chance to meet other instructors.

However, I've seen the downside of this. Twice

in Taiwan where the locals systematically cheated and lied and manipulated against foreigners, especially in 1984 when I withdrew the British team and publicly smashed and threw on the ground the present given us by the president of their Tai Chi Chuan federation.

Other gatherings such as Riecontre Jasniere, Tai Chi Caledonia and the European Tai Chi Chuan /Qigong forums of the TCFE are important as places where there can be exchanges of ideas on a cultural, technical and pedagogic level.

Do you feel any personal responsibility to the art?

Albert Camus said, "None of us is guilty because we did not begin history; none of us is innocent because we continue it." We who are teachers have a certain responsibility for how, what and who we teach. What I do believe is to treat people as individuals; I believe people cannot and should not always be taught the same things and in the same way.

One publicly asked why you taught taijiquan you replied, "to make money and meet interesting women." Do you still feel this way about it?

Marpa, the translator, was asked by one of his students, "You said that if one does not enjoy meat, liquor and women, it is a disservice to oneself. It appears to us that this is no different than what we do." Marpa replies "Though I enjoy sense pleasures, I have these confidences I am not fettered by them." And later, "While enjoying sense pleasures, I meditate on the deity.... "I do meditate in my Neigong practice, though not on any deity.

Finally; as a young man you entered the world a taijiquan to learn how to fight effectively, are you still fighting the same battles or do you get something else from the art?

There are always more battles though not necessarily against the same opponents. I have a responsibility to Tai Chi Chuan and the Chinese internal arts in general and to my own school in particular to act to further and to protect our interests.

Surge Dreher and members of the French taiji federation have encouraged me in different ways through some of my contacts eastern Europe, in particular to try to help make a truly European Chinese internal arts movement so that there can be an enriching exchange of ideas and culture. I believe that this is a Holy Grail that is worth questing for.

Interview with

CHRIS THOMAS



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

While studying karate at university I attended the All-Style Karate Championships at Crystal Palace in, I think, 1972 and, in one of the intervals, I watched Danny Connor and Bruce Frantzis demonstrating Tai Chi. Whilst other karate enthusiasts in the audience started kicking their feet, rustling papers, coughing and talking, I was entranced and wondered how this slow and relaxed exercise could be a martial art. Later, I attended the British Universities Karate Federation Championships in Salford and saw Danny demonstrating again. I talked to him and discovered he was teaching at the Polytechnic in Manchester, just across the road from where I was studying. The rest is history.

What does the art mean to you?

In the early years, having started with judo at age 16 and then moving to karate when I got to university, I was more interested in the martial aspects than any health benefits. Now that I move into the autumn of my life and the vagaries of aging become apparent, I practice more for

health than martial – though the martial interest is obviously still there.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

Through Danny Connor, I was introduced to Nigel Sutton and became friendly with him. He asked me to get involved when he and others were looking to start up a national all-styles taiji association. That first year I had other things taking my time but the following year I joined, having been encouraged by another friend, Bob Lowey.

Neither my brain nor my records go that far back, however, I suppose it was not that long after that I joined the executive. As to why I became involved – I did believe in having an oversight group to develop genuine taiji, in all its versions. At the time, the BCCMA, driven by Master Huang Ji-fu, was asserting that the BCCMA was the only governing body for all Chinese martial arts and was looking to control taiji in the UK. They were not too concerned about taiji for health, mainly driving it as a martial art, martial arts being the reason for their being. As I had other friends who taught mainly for health and well-being, I was concerned about the taiji world being split between “us” and “them.”

Some decade and more ago, I resigned from the committee – I won’t go into the reasons. However, I see now that there are issues that need resolving and want to see the TCUGB moving forward into the 21st century and want to help with that.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

Has it changed? When I started, the Bruce Lee boom was at its zenith and many wanted to learn this “Grand Ultimate Fist” martial art. On the other hand, the “flower power” influence was still swinging/singing along, and many practised their version of taiji for those reasons. Danny Connor was one of the first teaching openly in the UK – certainly in the Northwest – and one of

the first westerners to bring the art back from the Far East. Things have changed in that there are now many westerners who have been learning for many years and can form a bridge between East and West. Taiji is now more widely known and every adult education and church hall seems to have its taiji class.

Qigong, I think is in much the same situation now as taiji was in the past - it is not so widely known. Most westerners have no idea how to pronounce it, regardless how it is spelled, qigong or ch'i kung! Taiji systems usually include some form of qigong, and teachers often include some form of qigong as an adjunct to their taiji. However, now there are a few people that have put in the time with respected qigong teachers and are able to teach qigong authentically.

The main thing that has helped to develop knowledge about the systems in the last 30 or so years is, I think, the internet. Just about anything and anybody can now be found on the internet. When I was a lad at school, I had heard about taiji – but only from the odd book I had found by Bruce Tegner! Also, only a very few years ago, it would not have been possible to hold online classes in the way the likes of Zoom have made available. That is a big change. Ten years ago the 2020 pandemic would have killed off taiji and qigong classes.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

Hmmm – a good question. Decades ago, there weren't so many good taiji practitioners around and, unless you lived in one of the larger cities, it was difficult to find a good teacher. As the decades have moved on those quality practitioners have developed students themselves to a good level and it is now easier to find a good teacher. In the last decade or so I have not ventured much outside my own circle, attending competitions and events, so it is difficult to make a judgement. However, in the early days, the TCUGB was

looking to include all teachers in membership, regardless of level, with the aim of developing the skills and knowledge of those at a lower level. Looking at the TCUGB website it is clear there are still people teaching at a basic level so, as taiji has spread, this aim is still relevant.

Qigong, as I say, is in the position, now, that taiji was in decades previously. There are a few good practitioners around who are looking to develop the skills in the general population and it is clear this is going to accelerate.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I would like to see information about the arts of taiji and qigong promoted so that schools, colleges, Adult Ed. Centres, the medical profession ,etc. know exactly what they are hiring. Most, I believe, seem to think they are some sort of soft exercise that is good for relaxation and health (or maybe just good for bringing punters into their centre) without knowing exactly what the benefits may be. Or maybe I am just being pessimistic.

As a martial artist, I do not want to see the martial root of taiji lost. However, I do believe that there is a lot of work to be done in promoting taiji and qigong generally within the medical profession so that the practices become more generally available, rather than being solely linked to the more enlightened practitioners in certain sectors.

Any other thoughts?

I remember, back in the dim and distant past, attending AGMs where the TCUGB took over half of a large Chinese restaurant in Chinatown in London. We had a good meeting, attended by many, followed by demonstrations and a Chinese banquet. The last AGM I attended, held in Telford, was attended by half the committee and maybe two or three other ordinary members! I would like to see the TCUGB connecting with its members again – maybe in a different way, but certainly reconnecting in some way.



Chen Hsin Tui Shou

THE ART OF EFFORTLESS POWER

A LOOK AT THE WORK OF PETER RALSTON
BY KALUS-HEINRICH PETERS | ISSUE 20, SUMMER 2005

Peter Ralston began studying martial from the age of nine. His martial arts travels lead him to Judo, Pa Gua, Aikido, Hsing I, numerous styles of Kung Fu, boxing and, of course, Tai Chi Chuan. In 1978 he won the Full-Contact World Championship held in Taiwan. He has been developing Cheng Hsin since the 1970s and teaches workshops the world over.

*"A warrior is measured according to this: that he learns from the dregs of the ancients and extracts clear liquid from them."
—Chozan Shissai, Japanese sword master, 18th century*

As everyone knows, the Tai Chi Chuan tradition is centuries old. Each tradition's different forms, rituals and exercises are a way of passing on the living experience of their founders. However, there is also the danger that these rituals can become an end in themselves and so the tradition stagnates and becomes a system of dogmatic rules without a trace of the original experience. The "inner" arts in particular cannot be learned purely by imitation, rather through deep understanding. As a result, they rely upon the fact that at least a few are able to reach the truth of the matter, which the rules and forms were originally based upon. We called these people "masters" and, because of their skills, these are the ones who have the right to change or found styles and forms.

Peter Ralston is a master in this respect. He succeeded in discovering the essence of the forms not only in Tai Chi but also in a wide range of other Far Eastern and Western martial art disciplines. In doing so, he reached the conclusion that the systems of exercises often failed to represent the real intelligence of these disciplines sufficiently. None of these traditional forms satisfied him as a way of practicing the principles of effortless power and affective interaction that he had discovered and so he created Cheng Hsin Tui Shou, the "art of effortless power".

Cheng Hsin is in complete harmony with the principles of Tai Chi Chuan, however, much of it surpasses the ideas known from Tai Chi. Externally it is at first obvious that throws onto the mat have been added to the classic Tai Chi techniques (uprooting, joint techniques). The whole domain of falling, rolling and throwing which makes arts such as Judo or Aikido so fascinating, has been included. As a result, Tui Shou has gained completely new ranges of movement and has opened up new areas in the three-dimensional orientation and physical awareness. In particular, falling and rolling allow a really relaxed relationship with the floor to

develop, however, the main effect is a greater sense of joy in playing and moving. Similar effects are achieved through the intense dynamics of performing the techniques: circling backwards facing a partner, then changing direction to find the right timing and the perfect distance not necessary for performing the technique not only trains the intelligence needed for moving and interaction but is also a lot of fun.

This external "increase" in variations of the game thus reflects the inner wealth of insights into the possibilities of the human body and human interaction. Cheng Hsin Tui Shou is by nature a system of exercises through which the principles of effortless effective body-being and of effective interaction can be experienced.

The most important principles of Cheng Hsin include first the classic virtues of Tai Chi such as relaxation (of the body) and yielding (during interaction). Characteristic for Cheng Hsin is its uncompromising consistency with which these principles should be practiced and realized. There are no "if's" and "but's" for relaxation and yielding, rather a sense of "more" and "even more"—they form the basis of effortlessness and being a body as well as in interaction.

As the pull of gravity is the most important external factor of physical existence, it limits the fundamental parameters of the organization of the body and movement. Through relaxation it becomes possible to build up a fruitful relationship to gravity: instead of fighting against its pull, it can be used as a source of movement.

Total relaxation encourages the realisation of the body's intrinsic strength. The body remains a connected whole when in a relaxed state; and when relaxed the arms do not fall off the shoulders and the legs do not fall out of their sockets. The inner strength, which keeps the body together, is obviously always there and does not require any effort. It is the basis of effortless power. "Intrinsic strength" is revealed in two ways: either as a compressing or stretching of



the bodily tissues. The effortless performance of the bodily tissues. The effortless performance of Tui Shou techniques is thus based entirely on transference of the “inner “strength produced by compressing and stretching. For example, after having established the physical contact in the case of a simple push-uproot, one’s own body is “moved into the partner” in such a way that the whole structure- hands, arms, trunk, legs, feet- becomes compressed from the point of contact into the floor. In this way, the natural elasticity of the bodily tissues can do the work needed for a push uproot. So, the idea is not to push the partner away but, on the contrary, to integrate with him to create compression within one’s own body. It does not require more effort to carry out an exercise using intrinsic strength than would be needed for moving the body alone (ie. without contact or a partner) The crucial factor here is of course the connections within the whole body from the hand to the feet. The main challenge lies in not cheating by stiffening the body, but in aligning all parts of the body so that they fall into place along the path of the physical forces, which makes any further muscle power unnecessary. Ralston likes to use the game of “pool” as an image. Just as each ball has to hit the next one at an exact angle so that this ball then hits the next one at the right angle... until the final ball ends up in the pocket, the impulse to move has to be transmitted from the center of the body to the extremities with no further intervention and vice versa.

The principle of yielding forms the basis for each interaction in Cheng Hsin Tui Shou and the rule of thumb when interacting freely is: do not let anyone put more pressure on your body than a mosquito sitting on your skin would be able to withstand. “Yielding” has a universal importance because it is independent of the partners strength. The effectiveness of strength and resistance is always relative, and is, of course, effective only when use against weaker partners. But even when a bull attacks there is still the one option- get

out of the way. Yielding, without resisting the partners movement or intention, not only serves the purpose of getting away from the partner, more importantly, it is the basic requirement for a smooth entry into his flow of movement, out of which the appropriate- effortless and effective- technique can be developed. Yielding as the basis for working with not against the partner’s movements and intentions, makes the application of further principles of interaction possible.

“Leading” is one of many such principles. For example, as the partner aims to uproot me or make me fall, conversely, I can lead and direct his movements by the movements of my body. As long as I am the target, he has to follow me which means I can mostly control his movements through my own. In this way, the leader directs the partners movements and attempts to put him in a difficult position.

“Leading” is an art in itself – even making an offering that the partner would really like to accept not only requires a serious offering of the self as a target, but also a clear perception of what it is the partner wants. Also, the gradual withdrawal of the offering so that the partner is able to and wants to continue following its path and requires a continual and alert presence in the interaction. The various aspects of leading enrich Cheng Hsin Tui Shou enormously. It is not limited to leading astray which expresses the idea of tempting the partner onto thin ice. It also shows that the partner under attack is by no means just a victim whose only possibility lives in escape, but that he is also responsible for shaping the interaction from the start. And finally, it may be seen even as a form of seduction, which brings the suddenly “erotic” interplay of revealing and concealing into the game.

Cheng Hsin consists of around 153 Tui Shou techniques from a simple push to complicated throwing techniques, very short and longer tai chi forms (12 and 64 postures respectively), a sword and a san shou form, in addition to boxing and countless exercises and games for

free interaction. All of these techniques and forms have been created especially to train the basic principles. Therefore, each technique has an “entrance” where the time-space set up for the application of a certain technique first has to be created by leading, yielding and neutralizing. The technique itself, namely the throwing or uprooting of the partner, is not at all the decisive part of the exercise. The actual interactive skill is revealed in one’s ability to play with the physical forces involved, the spatial relationship to the partner, and last but not least, with his intentions and perception. The subtle beauty of the game lies especially in this area, and the technique successfully executed at the end is only the icing on the cake. Practicing such principles is the only way one can reach new levels of interactive intelligence, instead of just learning mindless movement sequences. The Cheng Hsin training does not aim at an accumulation of individual technical skills, rather at a heightening of the overall intelligence of movement and interaction.

As with learning from any artform, the student is confronted with his limits, which he has to challenge and finally overcome. However, what makes Cheng Hsin unique is the extent to which the practice process is embedded in the art itself. It seems that training and enthusiasm are not enough to perfect an art. For the effectiveness of the exercise, it is important in which context the training is held – such successful use of context is usually referred to as “talent.” How can the fact that some people are “good at” or “gifted in” something and others obviously are not, be explained? What is it that makes a person “an expert”? The special quality of an outstanding musician is not revealed simply in an assured command of his instrument, just as the mastery of a painter is not only based on the perfection of his technique. The brilliance of a mathematician is not founded on the number of theorems learnt and memorize, rather in an access to the inner beauty of mathematics, which makes learning and practicing easy and actually possible. A person’s true potential in relation to an art seems to lie in a preconception of what he wants to learn and in his awareness of the underlying sense and the true nature of the matter. Alongside continuous training, a crucial factor for the students learning process is the fundamental attitude towards his art: the way in which it is perceived, how it is felt, imagined and judged-in short: how it is experienced and the extent to which the matter itself is present in this experience. The art of learning an art comprises the changing of the interpretations, moods, feelings and reactions, which determine the action to such an extent that appropriate and creative behavior concerning the matter becomes possible. To achieve something like this it is

necessary to question and eventually transformed the perception of the self and the matter. The fundamental beliefs of “who and how I am” and of what the matter is must be given up in favor of openness to the whole spectrum of human potential.

Peter Ralston has developed a series of workshops on the subject under the main heading “ontology” whose aims range from the development of interactive skills in Tui Shou to a direct experience of “who I am”. In this context the study of Tui Shou and learning is simply an opening for general questions about the nature of perception, experience and self that extends far beyond the art itself into the basis of our lives. Why is it that we get caught up in rational and emotional automatism when dealing with the rest of the world so that the events which actually happened only reach us through a veil of interpretations and judgments? What is it that restricts us to a certain perspective, to a certain image of ourselves and others, to certain opinions of “right” and “wrong,” to certain motives and intentions? What prompts us to see and treat things in one way and not another? What happens when precious concepts of god and the world do not prove to be the truth but just a concept? What is the truth then? And what is the world? What are relationships? What is communication? We live our lives and shape our relationships and behaviour according to the subconscious and seemingly self-evident answers to these questions. However, honest to God, we do not have any idea what these things are really about. Cheng Hsin does not provide answers to be believed, and is neither a system of beliefs, nor a philosophy. It is rather an invitation to experience the truth directly and for yourself, independent of philosophical concepts. This is the core of Cheng Hsin. The Chinese words mean: “your true nature.”

All in all, it is true to say that Peter Ralston’s teaching illuminates the space within which most of the taiji players are moving and exploring. The bridge the Tai Chi has built connecting the ancient Chinese philosophy to martial arts and physical training acquires a new foundation in Ralston’s hands based on living experience. Cheng Hsin with its techniques and games provides a new opportunity to explore and rediscover the effortlessness and functionality of movement and interaction, which Tai Chi promises. After the dust of exotic folklore and fantasies of Far Eastern wisdom has been blown off, an immediate directness and asking about the conditions of being a body, being in relationship, and being conscious opens up- revealing that the truth is after all wilder and more incredible than our most exciting fantasies.

Interview with

MARNIX WELLS

When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

After graduation in Chinese at Oxford, I applied for a visa to China and flew to Hong Kong in January 1968. There I stayed with a Chinese friend in Kowloon while awaiting an answer (which never came).

The 'Cultural Revolution' was raging, but Hong Kong had been spared any violence, though revolutionary posters and propaganda song and dance routines were everywhere in mainland department stores. Having done some judo, I was keen to learn a Chinese martial art, so my friend advised me to try the park around breakfast time. I never looked back.

What does the art mean to you?

A daily or nightcap routine which increased my resistance to colds. A new way of looking at body movements, which is a never-ending exploration. A way to test and improve skills with fellow practitioners. A way of relaxation and meditation.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

After my return from working in the Far East in 1993, I was invited by my friend Danny Connor to join the Union to get to know other practitioners of the art. Our AGMs in a Chinatown restaurant arranged by Katherine Allen were a great social event featuring individual demonstrations. Some years later Dan Docherty invited me to join the board which seemed a good way to help promote the art.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

Qigong is an integral part of taiji and internal

martial arts (bagua, xingyi). Recently Master Yaz introduced a new style (Zhaobao) over here. Dan Docherty and Gary Wragg's open taiji tournaments of pushing-hands and demonstrations of different styles have been epic developments. Barry Mcginlay's weekend pushing-hands forums in Regent's Park, recalling those I once attended in Taipei, was also a major step forward.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

The internet is a great resource for sharing information but no substitute for forums of physical interaction.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I hope the Union will continue to develop along the non-partisan lines initiated above and take the lead in promoting teaching at all levels.

Any other thoughts?

Taiji and internal martial arts have now reached a global level and offer opportunities for international cooperation on a level playing field. Different schools should be invited to advertise themselves through our magazine, AGM and all events, subject to mutual respect.



Experimenting with Principles

BY NATHAN MENAGED | ISSUE 24

Nathan Menaged began his martial arts training in 1976 with Okinawan Gojuryu. His continued search led him to Grandmaster William C.C. Chen. He is a senior disciple of Grandmaster Chen. Sifu Menaged continues to teach using the body mechanics approach he learned from Grandmaster Chen at his school in Columbus, Ohio.

Often, when I practice Tai Chi, I imagine I am standing on an imaginary square. If, when I'm pushed, I move my axis backwards or to one side my opponent can feel me, he knows where I am, and so it's easy to move me. What I try to do is not to shift my axis, not to move my waist from the center of the square, even though my feet move out to the edges. To practice this, sometimes I do the form trying to keep my waist from moving horizontally as far as possible, while trying to be single-weighted.

That way I can work better on yielding. I think of my torso as a rectangle with a fixed point in the middle. So, if I'm pushed to any of the four corners, represented by the shoulders and hips, or two points closer to the center, this rectangle oscillates around the central point. These ideas may seem to contradict the classic saying that the waist is the commander. The waist is indeed the commander, but it's working inside the body, not outside. I have developed six exercises, based on the arm swinging exercises taught by Cheng Man Ching, which allow us to protect the four corners and counterattack at the same time without shifting the center.

Regarding double-weight, I have my own theory. I think that when people make an effort to be single-weighted, they are in fact being double-weighted and it's more difficult to move. I think double-weightedness has nothing to do with 50-50 in both legs, but it's more to do with tension and a frame of mind. When you turn over an hourglass the sand does not fall to the back and then to the front. It drops like in the three nails mechanics: it falls to the inside then spreads out. That is single-weight. If you are able to let the weight fall on a single point, even on one leg,

then you are acting like an hourglass, with three extensions to grab or strike.

The principle of developing now is that everything is right triangles. We can move the weight from one leg to another without the need to move the waist in two ways:

A) the feet move and the torso remains fixed. If we want to change the weight on the back leg (full) to the front leg (empty), the latter moves to the center and fills, while the back leg empties and goes back. To change the weight from the front leg to the back, the back leg moves forward to the center and fills, while the front empties and advances.

B) the torso leans and the feet remain static. In the second case, relaxing the hips and the Tiantien area backwards or forwards, the weight would transfer from the forward leg to the back leg or vice-versa.

I can already see eyebrows being raised at the word "lean". Some people think that if your upper body is not straight all the time you were not doing Tai Chi. But this does not contradict the classics in anyway. As I'm being pushed, I'm changing the right triangles I lean on and can neutralize the force without moving off the same spot, relatively speaking.

The use of counterbalance is based on the same principle. People in Tai Chi generally speak of balance in the sense of 50-50 or empty-full. But when the Chinese weigh their medicines, they use a steelyard. A construction crane has the same mechanism. That's how I think balance works most of the time. And using counterbalance allows us to neutralize attacks, both above and below the waist.

Interview with

TINA FAULKNER ELDERS



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I started as a child in 1982 with Kungfu. My dad used to practice constantly and I just loved the movements. I was maybe around 12 when I started with taiji and qigong. I had already been involved with what I now know to be Neidan practices. The feeling of listening and guiding and putting this into movement really struck a chord with me.

What does the art mean to you?

The art is a way of bringing myself back home to myself. It is self-cultivation to nurture and develop. It puts everything into perspective and reminds me that I am part of the nature of all things. It is my happy place!

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

I became a member of TCUGB 23/03/15.

I became a member of the executive board 27/11/20.

I wanted to become involved because I want to help raise the awareness of taiji and qigong. For the mass population there still seems to be this mystery about taiji and so a great many people still shy away from it. The reality is that it does cover a great range from martial to health to spiritual and philosophical depending on your perspective. Whatever angle you approach it from, taiji is hugely beneficial to anyone who takes up the art.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

Taiji and Qigong have become more popular. This on one hand has led to easier access to real knowledge of the art, on the other hand it has also led to massively watered down versions.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

You can refer to my answer above for this.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I would like to see it used far more for rehabilitation, health and prevention of ailments. This, of course, requires it to come from a place of knowledge and expertise.

Any other thoughts?

Just to say that I am optimistic for a bright and supportive future for the practitioners of taiji and qigong.



Yi Qi Li

AND DULL FORCE

BY DAMIEN MITCHELL - LOTUS NEI GONG | ISSUE 29, WINTER 2009

Damien (Damo) Mitchell begin his studies of tai chi chuan at age 14, starting with the Zheng Manqing style, initially under his father, Paul Mitchell, and uncle, Phil James. He was a student of Shen Hongxun and later spent over a decade traveling throughout Asia looking for masters to help him unlock the secrets of the internal arts. In this article, Damo looks at the relationship between Yi (focus), Qi (internal energy) and Li (strength).

In the Chinese martial arts, muscular strength is known as Li. This is considered the most basic way to issue force and is often called 'dull force' in martial circles. If a martial artist uses 'dull force' then they have not yet reached a high level of understanding and their Gong Fu is considered poor.

More advanced martial artists understand the concept of 'Fa Jin' which can be a confusing term to understand at first. Fa means to express something. Jin is not a word we have an English but can be thought of as a way to issue power using the body's internal energy (Qi), muscles (Li) and focus (Yi) as one unit.

In order for Qi, Li, and Yi to work together we must first soften the body to allow for smooth internal energy flow throughout the meridians (Jing Luo). Now, depending on what type of Fa Jin the martial artist is using, the Qi will relate to the muscles in one of two main ways. If the Jin is more external in nature, then the Qi will invigorate the muscles and so power them up for the strike. This type of Jin can commonly be seen in soft hard Gong Fu styles such as White Crane Boxing (Bai He Quan) or Forever Spring Boxing (Yong Chun Quan). Often, beginners in Chen family Tai Chi Chuan will issue force in this manner as well, the power from the strike typically enters a couple of inches into the target before it reaches its peak. In this way deep tissue and organ damage can be caused.

More advanced are internal Jins which do not rely on the muscles being powered up by the Qi. Instead, the muscles remain soft, allowing the body's internal force to pass through them and out beyond the limits of the physical form as a vibration frequency. This type of Jin can either be 'short' whereby the target's structure is

compromised which result in them being dropped to the floor or 'long' which looks as if the target has been lifted into the air by a strong breeze. Long internal Jins can often look supernatural with people being tossed around with minimal effort as though they were paper dolls.

The one factor which connects all of the above Jins is the need for focus. Focus (Yi) leads the body's internal force and so it is commonly said in martial circles that the Qi follows the Yi. In order for there to be sufficient focus to transcend 'dull force' the mind must be kept very quiet and still during training and combat. A busy or disturbed mind will lack the level of intent required to lead the body's internal force and the resulting strike will lack Jin. Herein lies one of the most important reasons for meditation within martial arts practice. Physical movements may help to conquer the mechanical aspects of Gong Fu training but meditation is required to conquer disturbances within the mind.

Traditionally, meditation and martial arts went hand-in-hand. Shaolin monks who trained Gong Fu also practiced Buddhist meditation, Taoist monks who developed the Wudang styles learnt internal alchemy and the Samurai of feudal Japan studied Zen. To remove some form of meditative practice from martial arts is to seriously hinder the development of Yi and so Jin.

Interestingly, those who study meditation never reach a high level without first settling their inner nature and demonstrating a high level of morality in their daily actions. This means that those who do not study their Gong Fu diligently AND live with a kind heart may never developed their Fa Jin beyond 'dull force.' This is very difficult study and many martial artists fail to understand this let alone achieve it in their training.

Interview with

WES MOLLISON



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I began training tai chi and associated disciplines 22 years ago. At that time, I was studying and practicing meditation quite seriously, and I was exploring various traditions to try and find a practice that really resonated with me. I was also, though somewhat less seriously, enjoying some martial arts - mainly western boxing and some Japanese arts - but with both of those pursuits (which I am still fond of today), I felt there was a small but important piece of the puzzle missing.

I'd had the thought of tai chi at the back of my mind for a while, but good tuition was hard to find in the area I lived in at the time. But then, a chance encounter led me to my first teacher, and, I'd say from an hour into that first session, I was convinced I'd found the practice that I could finally fully connect with.

I trained on a one to one basis with my first teacher two times a week for three years. It was always outdoors, under the same magnificent Japanese maple tree at the local park. And as I observed the seasons come, go, then reappear

the following year, as I continued to deepen my practice, I realised that tai chi had become an inseparable part of me.

What does the art mean to you?

I enjoy all aspects of the art, so I view it as simultaneously a method of holistic health improvement, of self- cultivation and a method of self-defence. But ultimately, for me, tai chi is the pursuit of harmony. To gradually cultivate harmony between one's body, mind and breath. Harmony between our thoughts and our actions. Harmony between ourselves and others. Tai chi can be a deeply rewarding journey, and I believe harmony is one the jewels of its many great treasures.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

I joined the TCUGB 14 years ago in 2006 and became an advanced level instructor member two years later in 2008.

At the time of answering this question, I became a member of the executive board just three days ago! I wanted to become involved at this level because I believe passionately that tai chi and the Chinese internal arts in general can be a great force for good, and I feel the TCUGB is in a unique position to contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of our society, as well as ensuring that the integrity of these arts are upheld and maintained.

The tai chi community is a vastly broad church which I believe should be both respected and celebrated, and all aspects of which I believe have a lot to offer our society. I would like to play my part in ensuring that the TCUGB leads the way in enabling as many people as possible can benefit from what these wonderful arts have to offer. The world is changing quickly - as are people's approach to health and wellbeing, and I would view it as a shame if the TCUGB didn't maximise its potential in its contribution towards this endeavour.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

I think the most significant change to the internal arts over the last few years has been the impact of social media. On the one hand it has benefited us greatly - connected a worldwide community together and really opened up the bandwidth of information and knowledge one can access regarding these arts (I wouldn't have met my Sifu eight years ago if it wasn't for Facebook!). But on the other hand, it has also had the ability to reinforce cliques, echo-chambers and tribalism. It is these latter aspects of the internal arts community that I have always been committed to opening up and reducing.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

My personal view is that the level of tai chi & qigong is both increasing and decreasing in almost equal measure. I can sincerely attest that the UK has some truly brilliant practitioners and teachers that are taking the art to very high levels. Dedicated practitioners that are genuinely developing the art through their study and teaching. The UK is not alone in this, but we are still very fortunate.

At the same time, I see some practitioners picking up superficial skill and then marketing it

disproportionately, and then soon going on to teach the general public. I would like to see more transparency and clarification on the depth of instructors' abilities; but more than that, I would like to see an environment that really supports further training and development for all. Ultimately, we are in the business of helping others, so let's do it together to the best of our ability.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

Well firstly, I would like to see the internal arts community emerge safely out of this pandemic so that we can train, teach, compete and enjoy the events and get together in a way that resembles something close to how we did these things before Covid 19 arrived.

Other than that, I would like to see tai chi and the internal arts expand and improve so that more of society can benefit from what we have to offer.

Any other thoughts?

I think at this stage I would just like to wish good health to everyone reading this magazine, and to say that I am looking forward to making my contribution towards the TCUGB progressing positively going forwards.



Tai Chi in Spirituality

BY BRUCE FRANTZIS | ISSUE 39

Bruce Frantzis is a Taoist lineage with over 40 years experience in Qigong, Bagua, Hsing I and Tai Chi Chuan. Bruce trained in China for over a decade in these arts. Additionally, he has experience in various meditation practices including Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Kundalini and the Taoist Fire and Water traditions.

Tai chi is an art, not a religion. To practice Tai Chi you do not have to believe in gods, spirits, the Tao, or an afterlife. There are large numbers of Tai Chi practitioners of all religions. Yet many consider the practice of Tai Chi to be a spiritual practice. There are several reasons for this. The line between the art and spirituality is often very thin. Techniques of art can stimulate the creative forces and refine them. If that intensity is directed toward inner discovery, rather than external accomplishment, the training that the art provides me bridge the gap between the secular and the spiritual. If so, art thereby becomes a tool for spiritual awakening. This can be the case with the practice of Tai Chi.

Tai Chi contains within it much of the East's philosophy and wisdom that is immensely practical and useful for our daily lives. This includes the wisdom it applies toward health and relaxation; to chi energy in the human body and mind; and to strategies for dealing effectively with the practical matters of business, conflict, and human relationships. However, except in a few legends, Tai Chi does not claim to be divinely inspired. It is the wisdom of men and women seeking to make this earthly life work well. Yet, the line between wisdom and spirituality can also be blurred, as wisdom is often gained through various spiritual practices. For all these reasons, the philosophy underlying Tai Chi is often taken to be spiritual.

Although the energy work of Tai Chi originated with Taoist monks, I know of no evidence that Tai Chi was developed for spiritual or religious purposes after it emerged from the Chen village and was spread by the Yang family. I had informal conversations about the subject with the Tai Chi master Yang Shou Jung after he accepted me as a student. He was the great grandson of Yang Lu Chan, who founded the Yang style of tai chi. When I asked if he taught meditation, he said that this was not, and had never been, an aspect of his family's training, which was about chi development and martial arts.

Meditative Movement

Tai Chi is commonly called moving meditation. This phrase is derived from the Chinese, gong jing, where dong means to move, and jing means to be still, which is a classic term in Taoism for the English word for meditation. The common meaning of the term in English, however, does not imply all that is meant in Taoist meditation. Moving meditation in English merely implies that Tai Chi's movements are done in a meditative way, which is how 99 percent of most tai Chi is done. For this reason, we will call such a meditative movement "secular Tai Chi," to distinguish it from the purely spiritual context of Taoist meditation. Secular Tai Chi means to maintain a relaxed focus, quiet one's internal conversations, and do movements in slow motion with a deep sense of relaxation.

The secular meditative movement aspect of Tai Chi is, however, only a shadow of the full implication of the deepest spiritual levels of Taoist moving meditation. There it connotes a deep inner stillness that can stably and permanently live at the heart of one's spiritual being. Inner stillness is a central goal of both Buddhist and Taoist meditation methods. From the classical Eastern perspective, meditation goes far beyond popular Western conceptions of spirituality. The full opening of your inner being (or soul), or enlightenment, is meditation's central focus. This opening allows your heart and mind to become truly free. It is a subject to be learned by deeply exploring your inner landscape over many years, using extremely sophisticated practices and techniques honed by practitioners over hundreds of generations.

Secular Tai Chi is an excellent way to build the foundations that all forms of meditation or deep levels of spirituality initially require. These include:

- Constancy of purpose.
- The ability to go within.
- The capacity to recognize and apply

progressively more subtle levels of your awareness.

- Focusing for extended periods on specific inner qualities with minimal distraction.
- Being relaxed, without which of the previous requirements are difficult to sustain.

Taoist Moving Meditation: Taoist Tai Chi

The internal methods of Tai Chi were adapted from millennia-old schools of Taoist chi gung, which used entirely different movements. During the 19th and 20th centuries, some Taoist meditation schools adapted the spiritual techniques within long chi gung sets into tai chi forms.

In the Taoist tradition, the road to spirituality involves more than having health, calmness, and a restful mind. The goal of Taoist meditation is to directly connect with your soul and free the deepest recesses of your being. The highest purpose of meditation is to make you aware of the permanent, unchanging center of your being, that place of spirit and emptiness that is Consciousness itself. This level is beyond mere physical and mental relaxation; rather, it is relaxing into your soul, or your very being.

In this tradition, spirituality does not come like a bolt from the sky, just because you want it. It is a subject to be learned by deeply exploring your inner landscape over decades. Once you have health and peace of mind, you are ready to embark on three key stages towards achieving the goals of Taoist meditation. Only after you have more or less fully completed one stage, are you ready to embark on the next.

The three stages consist of the following:

1. Becoming a fully mature human being who is wholly free of inner conflicts and inner demons. Taoist meditation helps you completely release all the small and large conditionings, tensions, and blockages that bind and prevent your soul from reaching its full spiritual potential.
2. Reaching inner stillness. Taoist meditation brings about a place deep inside you that is absolutely permanent and stable. It does not waver, whether you are quietly sitting or are involved in doing fifty things at once.
3. Transforming the body, mind, and spirit through internal alchemy.

The stages of Taoist

meditation can only be taught by a living Taoist master and, depending on the school, may be taught as sitting, standing, moving, or sexual practices. As with any tradition, there are many schools and subdivisions within Taoism.

The Taoist Tai Chi Tradition

There exists a rare tradition of people who use Tai Chi to achieve the goals of Taoist moving meditation. They interweave within Tai Chi's physical movements specific energetic techniques to help achieve the three stages of Taoist meditation. Many of the martial arts masters I met in China were aware of the tradition, but few knew Tai Chi masters who had transformed the practice of Tai Chi to a complete Taoist moving meditation method. Such meditation and Tai Chi masters share this tradition only with practitioners who had achieved a high degree of proficiency in the energetic aspects of secular Tai Chi (but not necessarily its martial aspects) and had a sincere desire to embark on a spiritual path.

The religious sage and Tai Chi master, Liu Hung Chieh, my last teacher in China, was one of those people. I was very fortunate to be accepted as his disciple in Taoist meditation and, specifically, Tai Chi as a practice for achieving the goals of Taoist meditation. Today there are a few recognizable schools of Taoist Tai Chi in the West. Very few masters know Taoist Tai Chi and are willing to teach it. Usually those who claim to do so are mainly teaching Tai Chi as meditative movement to achieve health and calmness. They are teaching secular Tai Chi, not Taoist moving meditation or Taoist Tai Chi.

Taoist Tai Chi's Meditation Techniques

Taoist meditators believe that as humans, each of us have been given three spiritual treasures – our body, the energy which runs our body, and our spirit, called in Chinese jing, chi, and shen respectively. Each of these spiritual treasures is composed of energy – with body-energy being the least refined and vibrating at the lowest frequency, and spirit-energy being most refined, vibrating at a much higher frequency.

The overarching initial goal of practicing Tai Chi as Taoist meditation is to seek and find your spirit, i.e., Your soul: that which is



permanent and unchanging within you. You next allow your spirit to become fully open and clear, and then bring it to a state of stillness.

As a human, your energies at all levels of jing, chi, and shen are blocked from flowing freely and openly. For example, poor physical alignments, blood circulation, or nerve flow can block the optimum functions of the human body. Closed down acupuncture points or the inability to store chi energy in the lower tantien can block optimum chi energy flow. Spiritual obstacles can include being excessively self-absorbed, incapable of love, or fearfully consumed by feelings of alienation, morbidity, or events beyond your control.

High-level secular Tai Chi can be used to unblock the first two treasures of body- and chi-energy. Tai Chi, practiced as Taoist moving meditation, is necessary to fully unblock the third treasure of spirit. Taoist Tai Chi has many specific spiritual meditation techniques to help you do this.

Moving from the external: Focus on Jing (Body)

You train your awareness and ability to focus mostly on body techniques, with minimal chi energy and spirit work, until all your Tai Chi movements are so natural that you can do them automatically, even if half asleep. You must learn to be able to look straight ahead and extend your awareness until you can simultaneously feel your entire body and see it and comprehend what is going on outside it, without lapsing into distracting internal dialogue or “spacing out.”

Going Internal: Focus on Chi (Energy)

Your vessel (body) having been prepared, your focus now shifts to how to become aware of, open up, and control all the chi energies both within your body, and outside it in your external aura. You learn to notice ever more subtle energetic signals, which in turn can lead you to your tensions at the level of spirit. The more strongly your chi-energies flow, the easier it becomes to recognize the experiences lying at the roots of spiritual blockages.

Moving to the Most Internal: Focus on Shen (Spirit)

Here you learn to feel your most internal and refined energies of spirit and resolve the blockages that bind your soul.

The Cyclic Nature of the Three Treasures

Once you have a sense of the continuum between the external and internal, you learn to work simultaneously with all three treasures. You learn to understand how blockages at one energy level can comprise flows at other levels. For

example, blockages in your chi energy channels can deny you full access to the energy of your emotions that run within the same channels. This makes it harder to release and resolve negative emotions such as anger, hate, and paralysis, and replace them with emotions such as patience, compassion, and the willingness to engage. As another example, a block at the level of your spirit, such as malaise, may inhibit the flow of chi energy in your liver, potentially leading to weakness in the tendons and ligaments of your knees.

These interrelationships create opportunities for spiritual awakening. You can learn to gain access to a blockage at the spiritual level by first learning to recognize and then to resolve a related physical block. Or you can work at the spiritual level to unbind your blocked chi energy, or vice versa. The three treasures are cyclical. So, accessing the body gives access to your chi energy, which gives maximum access to your spirit, which then gives more access to your body, *ad infinitum*.

As you practice Taoist Tai Chi, gradually your awareness opens and stabilizes so that you become comfortable staying in the resolved open free space inside you where pure spirit resides. External pressures, and your own internal ones, no longer repeatedly cause you to return to the same blocked places inside you; such pressures no longer trigger old destructive patterns of behavior. You achieve longer and longer stable periods of functioning in the new open spiritual space. In a relaxed way, spirit begins to feel natural, and you no longer become caught up in the drama of having a “powerful experience” when you meditate. You begin to experience spiritual relaxation, the term Taoists have always used to describe the state of resting in emptiness, in Western parlance where the center of your soul resides.

In conclusion, secular Tai Chi can help your mind and body relax and achieve the quiet that many people associate with spirituality. These qualities help build the foundation for all forms of traditional meditation. In Taoist meditation, the goal of spirituality is to connect with the deepest recesses of your being and consciousness (the Tao). This spiritual path requires commitment to both learning and practicing. Within Tai Chi there is a rare tradition that teaches you to use Tai Chi to achieve the goals of Taoist meditation (Taoist Tai Chi). These goals are achieved in three stages: maturity, inner stillness, and inner alchemy.

Interview with

MARK CORCORAN



When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

I became a member of the TCUGB 10 years ago. I am a new member of the executive board being voted on in 2020. I became involved as I felt it was time to give something back to the sport that has given me so much, I have competed, gained many great friends, done workshops and learned a lot from the vast knowledge that senior members of the tai chi community hold.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

I have seen tai chi become less mysterious... this has, I guess, been instrumental in it becoming a major player in the exercise industry, becoming a favourite in gyms and studios around the UK.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

I see many very good practitioners of tai chi and qigong in the UK, the flow of outstanding teachers that come over from China is keeping the standards high and their dedicated teams of teachers and students are keeping on improving themselves and passing those improvements along.

Where would you like to see tai chi go in the future?

I guess, in my humble opinion, I would like to see tai chi and qigong take their place as some of the best stress busting, mindfulness exercises there are. We hear of breathing mentors, breathing is a mainstay of our arts, we read of how good mindfulness is, the movements of our arts are pure mindfulness, we hear that appropriate exercise helps to build our immune systems and... guess what I am going to say? Yup you can't get a much more appropriate exercise.

Any other thoughts?

Too many thoughts not enough paper, lol. I look forward to rolling my sleeves up and helping promote our arts, they are considered a national treasure in China. My hope is one day that same love of our arts will be embedded in the British psyche too.



Minding the Movement of the Body

BY PETER M. WAYNE, PHD | ISSUE 42, SPRING 2013

Peter Wayne is an Associate Professor of Medicine at the Harvard Medical School and the Director of Research at the Osler Center for Integrative Medicine. Additionally, he is the founder of the Tree of Life Tai Chi Center. Dr. Wayne has been actively involved in researching the effectiveness of Tai Chi Chuan for various health issues. He is the author of the 'Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi'. Below is an excerpt from his book.

Working by day as a medical researcher at Harvard medical school objectively studying the science of tai chi and at night as a community-based Tai Chi instructor, for many years I have walked to the metaphorical S-shaped line dividing the more rational and intuitive halves of the Tai Chi Yin and Yang symbol. Both as a scientist and teacher/practitioner, I have explored how best to bridge the wisdom underlying my two vocations, or how the yin and yang can inform one other.

One area I explore in The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi with writer Mark L. Fuerst is the practical application of intention, or Yi, which distinguishes Tai Chi from other exercises. Here's an excerpt from the book about that concept.

Minding the movement of the body

Movement and self-defense were the driving forces in the evolution of animal brains, so thinking about the brain in the context of Tai Chi makes sense since it is a martial art. Movement is a key feature of Tai Chi, which, legend has it, was based on the movement of animals in battle. This is not solely a physical phenomenon but reflects the connection of the body and the mind. In the early stages of Tai Chi training, the mind is often occupied with learning gross motor sequences and movement patterns, which can be helpful for memory. However, after you learn the gross movement patterns and become comfortable with them, the "thinking" mind begins to relax during practice and shifts more to observing the body in motion. As you progress further in Tai Chi, your mind begins to feel at home in your body as you move from position to position. Over time, you can begin to add intention through imagery. This enhances the quality and characteristics of the movements.

At even higher levels of practice, movement and thought become one; there is no lag time

between an intention to move, act, or react. You don't "try" to move a certain way, you just do the movement. There is no distinction between consciously "thinking" about the movement and the body physically fulfilling the request. Master Wang Xiang Zhai, founder of Yi Chuan, another internal martial art, said, "in a fight, if you have to think and then respond, you are too late."

If you play sports, you may have felt this hyper-merged mind-body state, often described as "being in the zone." I recall an interview with legendary Dallas Cowboys running back, Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith who talked about those unique moments where time seemed to slow down. He could see plays unfold in ultra-slow motion, which gave him time to choose the best direction to run the ball. Others have described similar mind-body states during meaningful religious or artistic experiences. For most athletes, these moments are atypical, occasional, and fleeting. In contrast, those who have attained higher levels of Tai Chi and related mind-body training can apparently shift into the states of "being in the zone" at will, and sustain them for significant periods of time. You might say that they can dissolve the hyphen in the phrase "mind-body."

One practical expression of the merging of mind and body in Tai Chi is the quality of strength or force used in movements, especially when doing interactive Tai Chi with a partner. Tai Chi classic and contemporary texts make a key distinction between strength that is primarily directed by physical force, referred to as Li, and an internal strength that reflects a more conscious movement, referred to as Jin. Robert Chuckrow, a physics professor and high-level Tai Chi teacher and scholar, translated Li as ordinary strength and Jin as "educated" strength. He speculates that the use of intention in mindfulness and movement

may generate low-level nerve impulses to muscles and surrounding tissues. These impulses are below the threshold of generating observable movement, but may add an energetic quality or liveliness – an intrinsic energy – to Tai Chi movements. This liveliness may also prime your body so that you are more prepared to respond, if need be (for example, react to an attack), in a more efficient, coordinated manner. This model of a highly sensitized neuromuscular system can explain how your body becomes attuned to react quickly.

Motor Imagery

A fascinating branch of Western mind-body research adds support to the impact of intention on movement and neuromuscular physiology. Many studies show that simply imagining a movement can improve the actual performance of that movement. This research also suggests that mental training, even without physical training, can change brain structure and function, similar to physical training. Motor imagery, as this is called, is commonly defined as the cognitive process in which motor acts are mentally rehearsed without any overt body movements. Motor imagery has been widely used as a tool for improving sports performance and is increasingly being explored as a promising tool for rehabilitation of neuromuscular conditions, such as stroke and Parkinson's disease.

One study conducted by researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation demonstrated that healthy young adults who mentally practiced simple muscle movements could increase strength and change brain activity. One group in this trial practiced only mental exercises to increase pinky strength. This group was asked to think as strongly as they could about moving the pinky sideways without actually moving the finger. A second group practiced actual physical finger exercises, and a third (control) group did no mental or physical exercises. The mental and physical exercise groups practiced for 12 weeks, five minutes a day, five days a week. Compared to the control group, the mental exercise group increased their pinky muscle strength by 35% and those doing the actual physical exercises increase their pinky strength by 53%. What's more, the improvement in muscle strength for the motor imagery group was accompanied by significant increases in a measure of the brain's ability to control voluntary muscle contractions.

In other studies, as Chuckrow speculated, motor imagery or intention resulted in measurable

changes in muscle activation. For example, in one study participants imagined lifting heavy weights, which enervated electrical activity in their bicep muscles. Many other motor imagery studies report improved physical performance of a task and measurable changes in the brain, however, they have not observed changes in muscles. This has led some researchers to hypothesize that the impact of motor training is primarily in the brain, and the peripheral

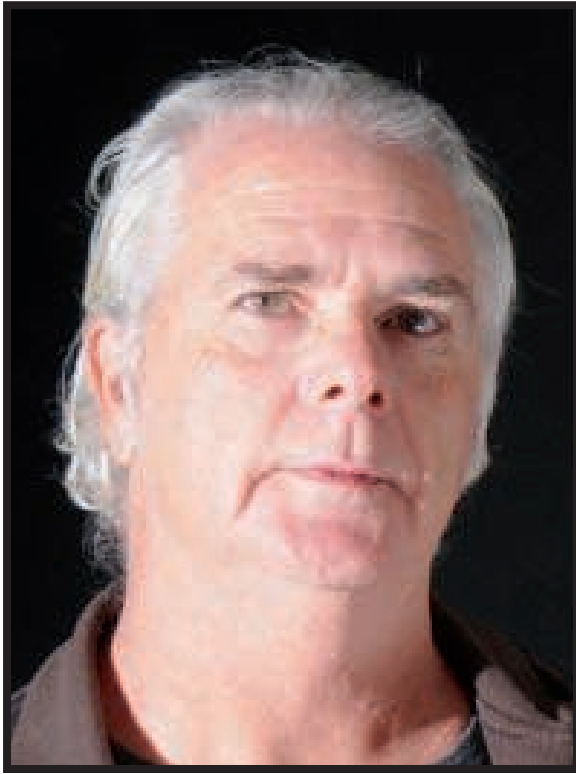
nervous system is relatively silent. It may be that the lack of electrical response in muscle is too low to be detected by instruments. Nevertheless, just the idea that mindful movement can improve motor function and learning is quite remarkable.

How is this relevant to Tai Chi? The majority of studies to date suggest that the best way to learn a new physical movement is to combine motor imagery with actual practice of the movement, which works better than either motor imagery or physical practice alone. This suggests that Tai Chi may be an excellent choice to rehabilitate and manage neuromuscular diseases, such as stroke-related paralysis, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis, and may explain why Tai Chi shows promise in preliminary evaluations of these conditions.



Interview with

BOB LOWEY



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

Qigong was an integral part of our training when I studied Chinese Martial Arts within the School of Wang Kung Shou Tao in the early 70's where I received Instructorship in 1979.

Having tried Judo and Karate, which was the mainstream Oriental arts around at that time; Chinese martial arts were frowned upon and thought of as bogus. For me, this school provided everything I sought, inclusive of demonstrating to others of the mainstream schools how effective it was – usually within closed doors!

Regarding our tuition in those days, one had to be extremely secretive of the training as not only the Qigong Animal Forms taught, but the ideology and internal practice was thought to be akin to Satanic rituals and could not be spoken of outside the class.

While dating a girl in Oxford in '73, I came across a book in the university book shop titled "Fundamentals of Tai Chi Ch'uan" by Wen-Shen Huang and printed the South Sky Book Compa-

ny. I don't know what attracted me to this book. Possibly because it was about Chinese martial arts or possibly because it was dedicated to Sri Aurobindo as I was extremely interested in all things related to Eastern mysticism at the time. I bought the book – which left a large hole in my budget and tried to learn the movements of Tai Chi from the descriptions and illustrations without much success. I pleaded with my teacher to teach me this art and after around 18 months was shown very basic silk reeling exercises from the form. I continued to practice these movements, and it was not until I returned from working abroad that I began serious tuition of the art with another teacher in 1981.

What does the art mean to you?

For me, Taijiquan and Qigong are the study and practice of the inner self and the mechanics of the body that in turn installs confidence and discipline and, the psychology of life in its many complex varied forms with a fundamental comprehension of that experiential learning.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

Taijiquan was gaining immense interest around the mid 80's and there was a generalised awareness throughout the country of schools of Tai Chi and workshops popping up here and there.

As popularity grew nationwide and throughout Europe, communications and networks grew between schools. Having successfully established one of the largest schools in Scotland in the late 80's, Seven Stars School of Taijiquan, I was dedicated to enhancing my student's experience of the art through public demonstrations, organising festivals of mixed martial arts and generally trying to draw all local martial arts schools together.

In 1991, my great friend Linda Chase Broda and I attended a meeting in London's Soho district regarding a collaboration of the heads of different Taijiquan schools in the UK. This was hosted by Nigel Sutton and Dan Docherty with a view on bringing all Taijiquan schools in the nation under one banner, which was the beginning

of the TCUGB.

This idea greatly appealed to me in the promotion and study of Taijiquan and Qigong.

Unfortunately, I knew quite a number of the attendee's and having socialised the night prior the meeting, fell asleep when the nominations for the executive committee were carried forward and missed this opportunity. Linda gave me hell! However, I was voted onto the executive panel I believe in 1993 and was Chairman from 1995 – 1998.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

Access into China, and Chinese citizen's admission to the UK became much easier in the late 80's and early 90's which initiated a closer cultural exchange. That is, more Chinese "Masters" were hosted to provide workshops in the UK and a great many students, me included, became "Toady's" or disciples of Grandmasters in China with frequent trips to that huge country for training.

The past 25 years consequently, has seen a plethora of Taijiquan and Qigong development throughout Europe providing reputable lineages of teachers and variable styles.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

The current standards of Taijiquan and Qigong in the UK are quite staggering in comparison to thirty years ago. Background information has become more academic making information easier to trace. I have since witnessed teachers in-

struct their students diligently through all aspects of practice and theory providing them with a solid foundation in the study of these ancient arts.

Unfortunately, there are those who wish to contain, regulate and dictate in a potentially political mode of approach which is not befitting "a way of life", which is the cornerstone of Taijiquan and Qigong.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I believe the TCUGB are fulfilling their role in the promotion of Taijiquan and Qigong but more could be done.

In my own opinion, it would be conducive reinstate regional offices in the maintenance of close contact of local Taijiquan schools. This is in the interests of providing members with a TCUGB representative in a quarterly or bi monthly visit whereby closer communications / planning of events can be disclosed and collated in their region to be fed back to the executive panel.

Any other thoughts?

Today, everyone is contactable electronically. However, the TCUGB is still publishing a hard copy of the magazine. A great deal of expenditure can be saved by having this in a downloadable format for members, and paid subscription for the public that would generate more funds.

It would also be advantageous for TCUGB annual / bi-annual meetings open to members at different localities throughout the country which would undoubtedly aid in TCUGB promotion and closer ties with members.



Tai Chi Sword Handling

BY FREDERIC PLEWNIAK | ISSUE 47

Frederic Plewniak teaches Yanjia Michuan Tai chi in Strabourg. He has been researching the martial aspects of the jian (sword) since 1999. HE has taught all over the globe including Tai Chi Calendonia.

In Chinese culture, swordsmanship and calligraphy are considered as intimately related arts. It is commonly said indeed that a sword should be handled as if it were a calligraphy brush. This statement will be clear to everyone who has tried one's hand at Chinese calligraphy: in order to achieve a proper control of the strokes, the brush must be held firmly yet not too tightly so as to be connected to the center of the calligrapher's body. Any weakness or stiffness in the way of the brush is handled will result in angular or wobbly strokes.

Similarly, when wielding a sword, a weak or stiff grip will hinder the fluidity of movement in the proper connection between the sword and the body, invariably resulting in clumsy and lifeless movements of the sword. In swordplay, an improper grip precludes sensing, adapting and reacting efficiently to the opponent's movements.

Since the way the hilt is gripped determines how retractable the sort is, an appropriate grip with the right alignment and a tensionless attitude are essential to achieve a good unity with the sword.

The sword grip

Of all the types of grips I experimented with, I strongly recommend the one shown in figure 1 for both routine practice and sword play.

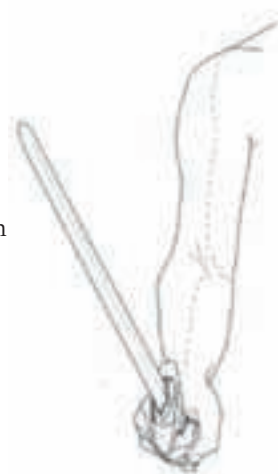


To take this grip, align your tiger's mouth, wrist and forearm with the blade then wrap your fingers around the middle part of the handle, between the two ferrules. The thumb and the middle finger lock the grip at the very center of the handle. Both the index and little fingers remain free and participate to the precise control of the hilt position in the hand or allow loosening or tightening of the grip.

As shown in figure 2, the wrist, elbow and

shoulder are aligned in the plane of the blade.

This ensures that the sword is firmly rooted in the hand and that a good connection is achieved between the centers of the sword and the body, a prerequisite for efficient absorption and expression without tension or strain on joints, muscles and sinews. Furthermore, in this position, the elbow lies within the protective range of the guard and thus is less exposed to quick blows.



Occasionally, the grip may be adjusted to perform a particular technique, but when doing so, it is most important that much attention is paid not to heedlessly weaken nor stiff in the grip. In any case, when the circumstances are not favorable for changing grip, which is often the case in free sparring, it is highly recommended to keep on with the main grip described above.

The sword mobility is also controlled by tightening or loosening the grip. It should be remembered though that no finger should ever fully release the handle: even when whirling the sword, all fingers should always maintain some control on the handle.

I am convinced that it is crucial to refrain from holding the handle next to the guard, even if the sword would feel less heavy this way because of the grip being closer to the sword's center of gravity.

First of all, when the hand is at the center of the hilt, the spindle-shaped handle fits the palm nicely and, as the guard and pommel are further away from the hand, they do not hinder sword movements.

Furthermore, Chinese guards being very narrow, they do not wrap fully around the hand as the rapier's shell does and do not provide as much protection to the hand. However, if the grip is centered on the handle, the thumb and forefinger

are further away from the opponents edge when controlling his blade and thus, are less exposed to accidental cuts than they would be with the hand next to the guard.

Finally, on a well-balanced sword, the center of rotation resulting from the center grip is precisely at the right location to enable the pommel to fully play its role in the sword dynamic balance, ensuring swift and lively sword movements that can really make a difference in swordplay.



The sword fingers

The hand posture known as the sword fingers or sword talisman is definitely emblematic of Chinese straight sword practice and particularly a Tai Chi jian. In its traditional version shown in figure 3, the index and second finger are extended while the thumb, the ring and little fingers are connected to form a circle. Some practitioners also use a more relaxed version where the thumb, the ring and little fingers are simply relaxed without assuming the form of a closed circle. The main role of the sword figures is to create a spiral connecting the tip of the middle finger to the point of the blade and balancing the weight and movements of the sword. The spiral is generated by stretching the left arm forward in a direction parallel to the line that passes through both tips of the extended fingers.

Although the spiral is effective with both the traditional and relaxed forms, the more constrained traditional one draws attention more readily to the left side than does the relaxed version.

When beginners hold a sword, their mind is strongly focused on the sword and their right hand. Very often, the other side of the body is left completely unattended unless they pay great attention to maintaining a proper sword fingers hand shape. It is therefore important that beginners do not overlook the sword fingers. It is only when they have gained sufficient experience and the balancing spiral has become natural that they may start using the relaxed form.

Wielding a sword

It is often repeated that the sword should be an extension of the body and that the practitioners

should be one with their sword. Although this may seem quite clear, it is far from being evident in practice. First of all, the sword should be considered as an extra segment of the arm with the grip playing the role of a supplementary joint. Like any other joint, the grip should therefore be relaxed and moving in unison with the whole body, allowing a sword to move freely in the hand.

If unity with the sword is purposed indeed, the sword nonetheless has its own individuality and its own particular way of responding to the practitioner's movements that depends on its physical characteristics. It is therefore indispensable that the sword's individual demeanor should be acknowledged in order to blend harmoniously its movements with those of the practitioner.

This is somehow similar to dancing: a good dancer does not merely impose steps on his partner but is constantly aware of her position and thus is able to adapt to her moves and gently lead her to take the appropriate steps for the next figure. The same stands when wielding a sword. Movement should not be imposed on the sword, but the sword should be guided towards the appropriate direction to achieve the desired technique. In return, the practitioners movements and steps are guided by the sword's weight and impetus. If the sword is an extension of the body, the body is, nonetheless, an extension of the sword.

There is a constant two-way exchange between the practitioner and sword that is most apparent in routine practice but is no less important in free play. Thus, even a rather heavy sword may be wielded effectively and swiftly with only a minimum of physical strength involved, the momentum of each movement being recovered and recycled into the next one.

The energy required to perform the techniques is provided by the weight and momentum of the sword itself combined with the right impulse for the body at the appropriate time. Thanks to inertia, the sword's center of gravity, born along by the sword's momentum, acts as a fulcrum to allow increasing the speed of the tip or pointing it to another direction. In free play, pressures exerted voluntarily or not by the opponent on the blade may also be absorbed, assimilated and transformed to generate attacks and ripostes.

To make a long story short we will conclude by saying that the energy is rooted in the hilt, controlled by the sword's center and expressed in the blade.

An American Taoist

INTERVIEW WITH YUNROU

INTERVIEW BY MARK LANGWEILER | ISSUE 51

Then interview with the American Taoist Yunrou appeared in the first issue of the Journal that I edited. I had been reading his novels for a couple of years under the Arthur Rosenfeld. Since those early stories, Arthur was ordained as a Taoist monk. As the interview reveals, I met Yunrou at his school in Deerfield, Florida.

I walked into the class on a Saturday morning. There were about 25 students working on various components of the form, weapons, standing in small groups talking. It was obvious that everyone was having a good time. The atmosphere was light but there was a fair bit of intensity. I have always said that the art is serious, learning it doesn't have to be. This was the epitome of that learning experience. I also took notice of the age range, from early teens (possibly younger) to several seniors. More of a community rather than a class.

Yunrou came over and introduced himself. And the class continued. It was clear that everyone had a clear idea of what they were to do.

I first knew of Yunrou as Arthur Rosenfeld, through his books. I had read his novels, 'The Cutting Season', and 'Quiet Teacher'. It wasn't until I read 'Tai Chi: The Perfect Exercise'

that I realised that he was a master Tai Chi Chuan instructor as well.

Ordained a Taoist monk at the Pure Yang Temple in Guangzhou, China, Yunrou has been studying the martial arts and Taoism for the past 35+ years has acquired the reputation of both high martial skill and as an acclaimed author.

I had the opportunity to speak with Yunrou after class. Unfortunately, our conversation wandered away from an interview format, more like two friends just talking about the world. Below are the answers to several questions I sent to Yunrou after the fact. He was gracious enough to take the time out of his writing and training (not to mention travel) schedule to answer these questions.

I know that you have studied several martial arts.

I've broken out the martial arts training for

you by way of answering the first question. I omitted training in the 1970s because it wasn't so serious.

1980 Tang Soo Do under World Champion David Jang, Santa Barbara, CA

1981 Chinese Kenpo under Christopher Wiedmann, Santa Barbara, CA Grandmaster Ed Parker lineage

1982 Chinese Kenpo under W. Crane Ponder, San Diego, CA

1982 Yang Tai Chi under Steven Leavitt

1983 Shorin Ryu (weapons only) under Cassandra George, Ithaca NY, created juvenile training program

1983 White Crane Kung Fu under Kwong Yu Godwin Chang, Ithaca, NY

1985 Choi Lai Fu Kung Fu under Frank Primicias, San Diego, CA

1986 Chinese Kenpo under Glenn Small, San Diego, CA

1988 Wing Chun Kung Fu under Calasanz Martinez, Norwalk, CT, Grandmaster Yip Man lineage

1990 Shing-Yi Ch'uan under Stuart Charno, Los Angeles, CA, Grandmaster Kenny Gong lineage

1994 Yang Tai Chi under Fu Yuan Ni, Santa Barbara, CA

1994 Yang Tai Chi Ch'uan under Toni DeMoulin and David Barton, Santa Barbara, CA, Dong Family lineage

1996 Shuaijiao applications in modified Tai Chi Ch'uan, Dale McNaughton, Boca Raton, FL

1997 to present Original Chen Tai Chi Ch'uan under Master Yan Gaofei and Grandmaster Chen Quanzhong (Chen Fa Ke lineage) with saltings from Chen Sitong and Chen Boxiang.

Why that interest and how did you find tai chi?

I don't suppose my start in the martial arts was so very different from so many other folks' in the sixties and seventies. I watched Bruce Lee and David Carradine on the big screen and on the little one, too, and was inspired. Perhaps one aspect of my interest that might be unusual is that I was more taken with the attitude of the blind monk in KUNG FU than I was with high kicks and screaming. Equanimity, peace, depth of thinking, understanding, and living was more compelling even to my child's mind at the time. Another reason I turned to training was the fact that my family included Holocaust survivors to whom I was very close. Hearing about the horrors of war while I was being held up, sometimes at knifepoint, at least twice a month in the violent and racially divided New York City of my youth led me to the notion that if I learned martial arts I could be the kind of person, the kind of man, who could not be forced to do anything against his will. Nonsense in the face of tactical nukes, political revolutions, SWAT teams, video, Internet, and audio surveillance, and Glocks in the glovebox, of course, but part of the fantasy that motivated me.

What was the trigger?

I was on holiday in Quito, Ecuador, a stop-over on the way to the Galapagos Islands. I met a pretty girl at my hotel and we went out to dinner. Afterwards, we were accosted on an empty street by a drunken policeman. He assaulted her and I hit him. The game that ensued was a blend between Midnight Express and Kafka. The net result was that I was incarcerated and abused, she was raped, and I had to bribe my way to freedom. Somewhere in that melee I made a deal with the Powers That Be that if I lived through those days I would learn how to hit a man so he stayed down. I made good on that avowal by enrolling in a Tang Soo Do class the moment I made it back to the US.

Do you remember what the first aspects of the art you learned? Was it strictly the form or was there something else?

Those early years in Korean karate were mostly about loosening my hips, stretching my hamstrings, and learning how to hit the bag hard with a proper fist. My teacher was a superb athlete and was wont to jump over a line of guys in a flying sidekick. Very showy. He liked himself a lot. My training with him came

to a close when he deliberately stood on my knees and ripped my groin to "loosen me up". I am limited by the scar tissue there to this day. When it comes to tai chi, although I practiced for many years before meeting my Chen-Style teacher, Master Max Yan, it was only after I started training with him that things began to come together and make sense. I remain bewildered as to why he is still kind enough to tolerate me and ever grateful for his teaching and his friendship. I also very much appreciate the support and encouragement of my abbot at the Pure Yang (Chun Yang) Temple in Guangzhou, where I was ordained a Taoist monk some years ago.

How do you practice today? Is there anything in particular that you concentrate on?

There is probably no finer practice than teaching, and teaching foundations to beginners most of all. I do an awful lot of that. Also, figuring out ways to convey complex ideas like silk reeling, fajing, and various versions of standing pole exercises helps me to understand these things more clearly myself. My own personal sessions unfold daily according to what I need. I focus on the traditional weapons in my own work and spend a lot of time with the Guan Gung Dao and the long (9 foot) spear. I also very much enjoy the physical challenges of leaping and low stances required by the Double Broadsword Shuan Dao form. Some days, of course, I just do quiet standing or work on some particular piece of qinna that I want to perfect. When I'm fortunate enough to have a high-level partner available, I drill applications in Pushing Hands and in combat.

Related to that, why Taoism? I know that you have undertaken a very serious study. How does it related to your tai chi practice?

There is no tai chi without a deep understanding of the relationship between yin and yang; that dynamic ever-changing and evolving interplay between opposing forces is precisely what tai chi means. Tai chi is a way of life, an awareness of cycles, forces, and trends. Tai chi ch'uan, the martial art based upon these principles and skills, is no more or less than an exquisitely beautiful physical manifestation of Laozi's Taoist philosophy. Most of us won't have to use the arts to save our physical lives but we can and must use them to save our spiritual and emotional lives every day. Tai chi can make our intellectual experience of the world



deeper as well. I was a Taoist from the age of 9 or 10, even started reading books in the Taoist Canon back then (along with some Japanese Zen material) despite having absolutely no idea what it all meant and never having heard the term Taoist. It is said that even in translation from the original song poem, the Tao Te Ching has a profound, almost magical effect upon readers and chanters. Perhaps there is qi in the very ideas, perhaps there is a rhythm to the words that transcends language, perhaps there is power in the visuals and examples that stirs the hearts and minds of women and men in a very particular way. Whatever the reason, when I discovered Taoism as an organized philosophy and religion (despite the very fact of its characteristic disorganization) I felt as an albatross at last come home to roost after flying for years over oceans. Everything from the deep and abiding regard for nature to the detailed analysis of human behavior, replete with foibles and traps, made (and continues to make) deep and perfect sense to me. It is a stunningly relevant way of looking at the world, practical, useful, and beautiful, too.

What do you see (feel?) is the essence of tai chi?

Relaxation, a wuji (balanced) mind, and the progression from philosophy to principle to applied technique.

As for your teaching, I saw that the class was divided into differing levels but that the general feel was one of lightness with a great deal of laughter and banter. What is your 'philosophy' of teaching?

You saw laughing? You saw banter? Let me know when and where so that I can snuff it out! Seriously, though, since relaxation is such a critical ingredient in tai chi success, the more welcoming and non-judgmental the study environment the better. Humor is an important ingredient in Taoist study. There is every record and evidence that the early Taoists were a Bacchanalian lot, reveling in the mountains between rounds of practice and meditation. Ch'uang Tzu, perhaps the most greatly-loved Taoist teacher is certainly a humorist. Laughing and humor help us relax. If people don't feel competitive one with the other and if they don't feel pressured to achieve, their mind and body relax and the ideas pour in through the training and help us to follow Laozi's exhortation to "be like water". We drink tea together, enjoy snacks, and usually have music playing



in the background unless I'm giving a Taoist "chat". I also read poetry from the Chinese wilderness tradition, mostly Tang dynasty, at the close of every class. In my experience, highly regimented classes, rife with ego and with a lot of bowing and scraping lead to stiff minds and stiff bodies, too. The essence of taoism is organicity and the essence of taiji class is, too. My grandmaster, Chen Quanzhong, once told me that the more balletic tai chi looks, the worse it is; the more organic and home-grown,

type of nonsense that surrounds us in relentless multi-media messages, sales pitches, news stories, and pop culture. Unlike such hollow promises, tai chi really does have the potential to be profoundly transformative on an individual level, one student after another. It comes from a different time and a different culture, though. Even in China these days it is difficult to find training that has not been tainted by the "I want demonstrable results yesterday" men-

conversely, the higher the level of accomplishment. This doesn't mean sloppy, of course, but it does say something about softness and the individual practitioner needing to make their art their own over time. I run my classes like a family gathering but without the usual squabbling. It's a community, and I believe the students enjoy each other's company and look forward to our meetings.

Speaking of teaching, do you see any common misconceptions that may hinder students learning?

Teaching and learning tai chi is a real challenge in America these days. We live in a culture of speed and greed on this side of "the pond" and of instant gratification and outlandish promises, too. Promises of losing 20 pounds in a week on a diet of grapefruits, assurances of profits of 80% in two months, and claims that we can learn real life skills through video games and get smarter from pills exemplify the

tality. In the chat I give beginning students, I tell them that while a closet full of black belts is no guarantee of success in tai chi, and while they don't need to be able to run marathons or put their leg upside their hand while standing on one foot, they do need to be able to make bewildered their friend for a few months until they begin to see what's going on, and to trust the process and keep negative and judgmental thoughts at bay. If they can do those things, accept that millions of people for hundreds of years have been benefitting greatly from the art, and if they can accept me (despite my manifest limitations) as a reasonable conduit of authentic information, then they will succeed.

How about common physical problems?

Tai chi can be hard on the knees if it is done incorrectly, which is to say without proper alignment between knees and feet and with undue emphasis placed on low postures rather than the spiral movements that open the kwa. I've seen people get stiff backs from engaging too robotic an affect while trying to do the form, and I've seen people suffer groin and hamstring pulls when doing vigorous weapons form training without sufficient warm-up. I can't say that those injuries are unique to tai chi, though. If we don't stretch and ease in to the practice, particularly as we age, we are asking for a reminder of the physical kind. Too, jumping ahead to exercises like fajing without waiting for the body to really relax can be a recipe for injury, as can using too heavy a weapon or one that is poorly balanced.

Can you tell me about 'The Sisterhood of the Bloody Tears'?

So you heard about that. I introduced a series of wall stretches that are fairly vigorous. Somewhere along the way they acquired that name.

While I was watching your class you mentioned that tai chi developed out of use of the halberd, can you clarify that for me?

Chen Wang Ting, the founding organizer of the art we now call tai chi ch'uan, was not only a recipient of Taoist training from his wife's family, the Li's, but also an observer of nature and a devotee of proven fighting techniques. Tai chi was originally a battlefield system, most emphatically not a practice for old people to commune with birds and nature in the park in

the morning. A popular and effective weapon of his time, and one it's still fun to watch being used in modern kung fu movies, is the halberd you mention, the so-called Spring and Autumn Broadsword or Guan Gung Dao. In the traditional Chen Family system this is a fourth level training tool. For reference, most serious students finish their lives in tai chi at third level, as "tai chi experts". There are many movements in the first open hand routine, Lao Da Jia, which are taken from the manipulation of the halberd on horseback, which required great relaxation, a horse-riding stance, great mobility of the shoulders, a strong and active dantian, and the ability to relax with a very heavy weapon in one's hand. Some of those early halberds were reputed to have weighed as much as 75 pounds, although in the Chen village the biggest ones I found weighed about 50 pounds. I have practiced with one that heavy but could the long and complex traditional form with it; some movements are just beyond me these days. Usually, I use a somewhat lighter one. The intricate footwork of the halberd form, by the way, was introduced later than the equestrian applications so that soldiers could use the weapon against cavalry and also practice it on foot.

Along with your tai chi, you are a very successful author. Do you see a relationship between your tai chi practice and writing?

My accountant would vigorously dispute your assertion, but thank you for the compliment. I suppose it's important to understand the natural cycles of energy and the need for rest in both tai chi ch'uan and writing. It's also important to feed the creative mind with insights into nature and the human condition, something Taoist philosophy provides in spades. During the last 15 years or so, I've devoted my writing of both fiction and non-fiction to the propagation of Taoist themes, memes, and ideas. On a more prosaic level, writing is tough on the body. Sitting is the new smoking, as I wrote on social media some years ago, and we must get up and move to keep our health. Practicing tai chi is a great antidote to the pitfalls and dangers of a sedentary lifestyle.

Any last thoughts?

I very much look forward to sharing my deep love of Taoist arts with your community!

Interview with

BARRY MCGINLAY



When did you start tai chi/qigong? What inspired you to start?

I started tai chi over 20 something years ago. I had already been studying another style of martial art, Hapkido, Wing Chun and kickboxing

I wanted to understand more of the internal aspects of martial arts culture philosophy.

What does the art mean to you?

Tai chi is a big part of my life.

When did you become a member of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain? When did you become a member of the executive board? Why did you become involved?

I became a member of the TCUGB about 12 years ago. I joined the board of directors about a year and a half ago. I was invited by Faye, Mar-nix, and Ronnie Robinson. All asked me to join the directors panel as they believed I would be a

positive person to be involved in the tai chi union for Great Britain.

How have you seen tai chi/qigong change over the years? In your opinion, what has been the most significant change?

I believe the most significant change in tai chi and qigong is seeing it get more publicity especially in the social media.

What are your views on the current level of tai chi/qigong?

The current level of tai chi and qigong, I would say, could be much better. There are some great coaches and teachers and masters in this country which aren't recognised. Unfortunately, there are a lot of weekend courses where you can become qualified as a tai chi teacher, which I believe demotes the status.

Where would like to see tai chi go in the future?

I would like to see tai chi grow and, with that, I mean grow outside of China, as we always seem to be looking towards China which is only natural. Tai chi to grow needs leave China to a certain degree. We understand where the roots are! Now we have some very high-level coaches. Just like we have Brazilian jujitsu which has grown since leaving Brazil. Or a bit like yoga. We no longer think of an Indian man in a loincloth, we think of usually a white middle-class, woman teaching yoga. This is because yoga has grown up and has outgrown India and become something much bigger.



Taiji

BASIC MOVEMENT PATTERNS & BODY COHESION

BY SAM MOOR | ISSUE 52

Sam moor is another who has appeared in these pages over the years. He teaches Chen style. In this article he looks at basic concepts of movement, patterns and awareness.

When I was a college student I used to give guitar lessons. It was a great way to earn money without being too time consuming and I soon realised that I really liked the teaching process, not to mention the independence of being my own boss. My students would start out by learning the basics; how to hold the guitar, simple scales, chords and so on. The only way to play more complicated tunes well, I would always explain, is to be competent at the basics, which requires diligent daily practise. How boring and not very rock 'n' roll at all! The students who followed my advice over the years went on to become decent musicians able to play almost any tune well by being forearmed with a fundamental understanding of and an essential basic skill in music.

The students who were most difficult to teach were the ones who were either tone-deaf or had no sense of rhythm (sometimes both!) especially when they didn't realise it and thought they sounded amazing! To begin with they would have no frame of reference as to whether something was in tune or in time. They would make a horrible din – lots of noise but no discernible tune or tempo – and they couldn't hear the difference between what I was playing and their cacophonic attempts. So with these students it was a really interesting teaching process and very educational for me. Slowly but surely I had to teach them, step by step, to really listen and pay attention to all the variations and nuances in tone and timing. Nothing could be assumed. Even more than usual we stuck to basic practise with lots of repetition and comparison of simple riffs. Students gradually build up a more accurate frame of reference. At times it was frustrating for both parties but when they improved they often couldn't believe just how far they had come to

understand something so simple. I guess it's only simple when you know how.

Krueger-Dunning Effect-Unconscious incompetence: The individual does not understand or know how to do something and does not recognize the deficit. They may deny the usefulness of the skill. The individual must recognize their own incompetence, and the value of the new skill, before moving on to the next stage.

In this article I will discuss how learning basic



movement patterns, and building body awareness, like learning the basics of playing guitar, should be the first port of call in Taiji classes. Otherwise it is like trying to teach Mozart to someone who is tone deaf.

During my two decades of teaching and training Taiji the most common problem I have encountered is that people spend a lot of time trying to learn the choreography of forms but do not actually learn how to move well, often lacking the most basic level of body cohesion after years of practise.

The big difference between music and Taiji is that while most people have some basic sense of music, many people are completely lacking in body awareness and have poor habitual movement patterns without even realising or conceding that such attributes have much value.

Basic movement ability and awareness are two of the most essential life skills – without them we are seriously compromised as individuals.

Taiji is often associated with oriental mystery and assumed to be an art of confusing subtle energies and spiritual ideals barely comprising a physical activity at all. My experience is that Taiji training principles are based on a long history of optimal body/mind training gained through highly perceptive heuristic movement, astute observation of natural phenomena at both micro and macro levels and rigorous testing through application (fighting/self-defense/life). Over a long period of time this experience culminated in a most natural and optimal way to train the human body and mind for health, movement and martial arts that we know as Taiji.

More often than not people immediately get bogged down with trying to learn and remember forms and as a consequence almost completely forgo the forging of basic body cohesion. Furthermore, by trying to remember choreographed movements rather than improving the basic nuts and bolts of human body-mechanics, people can compound the problems that they may have in the first place.

‘The more details you give people, the more they ask for details’ Nassim Taleb, *Antifragile*

Body cohesion is the essential fusion of balanced, connected, relaxed, 3-dimensional whole-body movement, strength and awareness that underpins all good movement and is especially emphasised in Taiji and other internal martial arts as a key-stone principle. The increasing popularity of intelligent movement training as opposed to superficial ‘exercise’ (check out Ido Portal and Conor McGregor for example) means that Taiji teachers really need to step up

what they are doing otherwise we will all be perpetually condemned to that abysmal umbrella understanding of Taiji as a pseudo-spiritual, faux exercise for the infirm.

Body cohesion is the heart of Taiji training and more than anything else building this whole-body connection will benefit the vast majority of people in terms of their physical and mental health and overall ability to move and function well.

As a teacher, I want my students to experience significant change in the way their bodies operate and not spend years worrying about remembering sequences of movements or theory. Ultimately I want to teach a person to improve the way they move, the way they use their body and the way they use their mind. As the vast majority of people are not used to learning movement or indeed moving much at all, the most significant benefit is gained from establishing the basic exercises (Jibengong). In most of my classes we spend at least 50% of the time training basics.

For people taking their first steps into Taiji training the last thing they need to do is to learn a form. Learning a Taiji form offers very little benefit if instead of learning how to move well people simply retain their old, habitual way of moving. This is especially true if their bodies are in poor condition and since many people come to Taiji because they think they are too damaged to do anything else this is a particularly salient point.

Countless hours spent trying to remember sequences of movements and puzzling over which body part goes where, when and why is almost a complete waste of time, although perhaps intellectually satisfying in a superficial sense. Instead the initial and ongoing aim should be that students look to the body and mind and build; build their awareness, build their body and ultimately build their body/mind connection. For all the major health, movement and functional (martial or otherwise) benefits our art has to offer this is the absolute foundation and without it the majority of training is a false economy.

Taiji is a martial art with a difference. Instead of learning fighting techniques the first port of call should be simply learning how to develop body cohesion. Moving well, being at ease with one’s physical existence, being immersed in down to earth sensory experience and possessing freedom of movement are vital attributes for life and are the basic skills we seek to develop in Taiji.

Ultimately this means that our training is much more physically and mentally rigorous than most people might expect. Creating a relaxed, stable, balanced and connected body requires a lot of

physical work; and you have to learn to calm and focus your mind, to pay attention completely, in order to succeed.

So having said that, here's a rundown of essentials we train in my classes and what I focus on in my own training:

Find your Body Fansong Gong

All of my classes begin with Fansong Gong, Chen Bing's unique loosening/conditioning method. Consisting of a wide range of simple though not particularly easy exercises, Fansong Gong follows a general theme of opening the soft tissues of the body along the main fascial lines. Not only does this build a body that is loose, elastic, resilient and connected but also teaches you how to feel the main kinetic chains within the body and how they are woven together to form the three dimensional body structure in a simple and tangible way. Fansong Gong also incorporates lots of variations of balancing on one leg. Some of the exercises are strenuous for not only do they create a strong stretch but also continuously emphasise developing a base that is sufficiently stable to facilitate balanced movement from the legs and centre that emanates through the whole body. Fansong Gong thus emphasises a number of key elements that people greatly benefit from in developing body cohesion:

- Basic movement of the hips and spine. Flexion, extension, lateral motion (side-bending) and rotation are explored throughout Fansong and seeing that these are areas which are restricted in most people, and of course vital for all movement and for developing ones Taiji, it generates delightful results.
- Balance and leg strength. Squatting motions and balancing on one leg help to build the body from the ground up whilst facilitating functional hip mobility. As unstable bi-peds, being able to balance well and having a stable base is one the most important skills we can develop.
- Connecting the arms to the back and freeing the shoulders. Our arms are not independent levers that are separate from the body, their strength and dexterity depends on how well they are connected to and stabilised by the back so that movement and power generated by the legs and body can flow through them
- Connection. Developing a clear felt sense of how all body parts are woven together, from the toes to the fingertips, through the elastic facial web.

Zhanzhuang Standing Meditation

Learning how to stand up is the next step after the elasticising endeavours of Fansong Gong. Zhanzhuang is simple and superb: it stabilises the body, stabilises the mind and develops a clear sense of the tensegrity of the human body structure. Tensegrity structures, such as the human body, distribute forces and movement throughout the entire system via the spring-like and elastic fascial web rather than being dealt with locally as they are in lever systems. A body that exhibits tensegrity in an optimal way is tensionally balanced in all directions under the reliable and constant pressure of gravity:

“Tensegrity describes a structural-relationship principle in which structural shape is guaranteed by the finitely closed, comprehensively continuous, tensional behaviours of the system and not by the discontinuous and exclusively local compressional member behaviours. Tensegrity provides the ability to yield increasingly without ultimately breaking or coming asunder” R. Buckminster Fuller

Tensegrity reverses the centuries-old concept that the skeleton is a frame upon which soft-tissue is draped and replaces it with an integrated fascial fabric with floating compression elements enmeshed within the interstices of tensional elements.

‘Being natural is the first and foremost principle in Taiji’ Chen Bing

Zhanzhuang is the epitome of reorganising the perceived separate parts of the body back into the homogeneous whole of a tensegrity structure. What separates the body is habitual tension and restricted movement underpinned by a lack of awareness in the corresponding parts. Usually we are not aware of the restrictive patterns that have become enmeshed in our structural fabric over the course of our lives. Everybody has them but they are essentially unfelt. Standing then, is to help us feel, locate and relax restrictions in the body structure. It's not that we want to replace one habitual posture for another but instead return to a settled state so that the body becomes less segmented and more integrated; a malleable mass free to be directed by our will. Through gentle and perceptive coaxing of the body we discover how it can support itself effortlessly from the ground upwards utilising the natural power of ground reaction force. The key is to quieten the mind by simply feeling and observing. Curious observation through the lens of stillness allows one to discover the inherent qualities our bodies possess and work with them rather than against them.

It is mainly due to our distinct lack of

body awareness and an incorrect, intellectual understanding of movement that we do not experience the body as a homogeneous whole and thus capitalise on its inherent, natural attributes. For usually when we exercise we immediately try to force the body to change in some superficial way rather than learning how pay attention to what it does naturally without interference, intervention or biased-control. It is the ability to pay attention accurately which allows us to discover the inherent structure of our human form, something that is with us whatever we are doing.

A very important point with Zhanzhuang is that tactile cues and posture corrections are essential for students to learn how to stand. One's habitual posture is usually so engrained that without regular feedback from a teacher's hands-on body adjustments it is very difficult to perceive. If your teacher doesn't give you tactile cues then you should find one that does.

Thus Zhanzhuang training facilitates a number of key developments:

- 1) More than any other training, Zhanzhuang, due to the absence of deliberate movement, allows one to gradually perceive and use the body as a whole unit, a tensegrity structure.
- 2) Strengthens and stabilises the body and mind at the most fundamental level.
- 3) Highlights how busy the mind is and as such provides an opportunity to learn how to focus on direct sensory experience and not thinking.

Learning to practise meditation is probably

one of the most useful skills that anyone can invest their time in. The mind is such a busy little monkey; always trying to pin things down, categorise and judge most inaccurately. It constantly craves information and fixed points of reference. Aside from this relentless activity the mind is also capable of quietly observing. Learning how to strengthen this observational aspect of the mind comes from deliberately paying attention and forms the most basic and most useful aspect of meditation. However, sitting down more is the last thing most people need to be happy and healthy so throw away the meditation cushion and practise Zhanzhuang.

Walking the Walk (Zou Bu)

After Zhanzhuang the next basic skill I like to work on with students is being able to step well. Taiji walking has many variations but all follow the theme of learning how to maintain structural integrity, balance and connection whilst stepping slowly (to begin with). It is challenging to do well and without the distraction of waving the arms around students can really focus on moving in a balanced way.

Chansigong Silk-Reeling Exercises

"The general consensus has been to think of only one or two muscles participating in any given movement but no matter how common this misconception may be, the reality is that any movement is essentially a whole-body movement. For movement is not simply the mere coordinated bending of separate hinges but instead expansion, repositioning and contraction of the tensegrity of the body as a whole via the fascial web" Steven Levin

Simple Chansigong builds upon all of the preceding basic exercises and offers students the chance to discover how good movement flows smoothly and naturally through the whole body, from the feet to the fingertips, organised by the centre (Dantien). Training simple isolated, whole-body movements gives one a chance to get into the nitty gritty of what one is doing and most importantly how one is doing it. Any Taiji form is basically a collection of chansigong variations but as one goes from one move to the next any mistakes are usually glossed over and forgotten immediately. Practising Chansigong gives you a chance to discover and then iron-out any deviations in one's basic movement patterns using all of the preceding work as a tool for accurate cross referencing.

Conclusion

When people have a good grasp of the basics they become much more physically capable, confident and independent. From here they can





use their new skills to learn a form successfully with meaning and without being a slave to irrelevant details or the teacher.

I first came across the term 'Heuristic' in

Nassim Taleb's superb book 'Antifragile: things that gain from disorder'. The word heuristic comes from ancient Greek meaning to find or discover for oneself. I had not really thought about it too much prior to this but at that point I realised that this is how I learn and teach Taiji. In Taiji we have the general movement principles (one principle, three kinds of motion) or rules of thumb and it is through inquisitive tinkering via lots of basic training that you discover, realise and then own them for yourself rather than trying force oneself to adhere to them and/or just blindly following a teacher:

Heuristic: Serving to indicate or point out; stimulating interest as a means of furthering investigation. Encouraging a person to learn, discover, understand, or solve problems on his or her own by experimenting and evaluating possible answers or solutions or by trial and error.

I always encourage my students to pay more attention to their own body feeling rather than thinking about things too much. As soon as people start thinking they start to forgo their whole-body experience. I want students to learn how to learn from their own felt experience of their training rather than trying to remember things. It is because many peoples' felt experience, their sensory perception and proprioception are so limited that the mind takes over to fill in the gaps. That's one of the reasons why people crave details, in-depth theory and spiritual mystery rather than relying on their own practise and experience. Since we are so used to being spoon fed information from external sources it can be quite a big step to become more self-reliant. Training Taiji basics for body cohesion gives you all the tools you need. But don't take my word for it, try it for yourself.

Sam teaches Chen Taiji full-time in West Sussex. He is also an associate instructor for the Chen Bing Taiji Academy and a lecturer in Professional Resilience at Chichester University. You can see Sam's teaching schedule and more information here: www.sussextaichi.co.uk

The Great Heaven Circuit

RELATED TO XIAO YI JIN JING 小易筋经 SEQUENCE

BY LUIGI ZANINI | ISSUE 56

I first met Luigi Zanini at Tai Chi Caledonia. We started talking about qigong. The reprinted article is his discussion of the Great Heaven Circuit with a description of the moves in this important qigong form.

As one of the main teachers at “Tai Chi Caledonia” (see issue number 55 for the interview with Luigi Zanini) event, located in Stirling’s University in Scotland, this year I was asked to present my favourite internal work (Qigong-Neigong) exercise. The sequence I like the most and I’ve been introducing throughout Europe over the last 20 years is a synthetic version of the Classic of Muscles and Tendons Change (yijinjing), “Xiao Yi Jin Jing” and is based on a sequence of eight palms changes which includes a great deal of torque, expansion and contraction of every body part.

This sequence has been recently recorded and duly published on Caledonia’s Facebook page, in order to help everyone who attended the seminars have on-going support for their practice.

The beauty of “Xiao” (as someone loves to call it for easiness) lies in the simplicity of the

movements, the huge power it can generate, the amazing flexibility it offers and the ease remembering the postures. All this is condensed in the body and makes it an integrated whole. The sequence is practiced three times continuously using three different body/mind attitudes: the first (natural) as a kind of warm-up, the second (longer) to develop resiliency and connection, and the third (flexible) to release tensions and develop soft-dense strength quality inside of the body.

Xiao Yi Jin Jing is simple, but not easy to practice, especially in the beginning. We can practice it in many ways, but there is only one correct path that leads to a change inside and gets tangible results. During the weekend’s taster seminars in Stirling I also added a second topic, which supplements the needed skills to get deep into Xiao and to get an understanding of what’s inside the form. It’s about how we work inside our body-mind-spirit unity, acquiring qualities in the movement that will eventually help us discover and expand the benefits of the form.

Since this internal process of development is the real engine of Xiao Yi Jin Jing, I believe it is worth analysing it in detail. This will be helpful when practicing the form and give the correct sensations as reference points. Since the internal work moves through all meridians and involves the whole body, I have chosen the reference to the Da Zhou Tian (Great Heaven Circuit), but there is much more going on, as you will see in the 8 steps hereafter. Take note that all the indications are referred not to scientific measurements, but to our ability to get the feeling, nourish the sensation and transform this into a physical state. This is the reason why we talk about alchemy, and Neigong 内功 as a transformation process.

1) Standing to Feel - Zhan Zhuang 站桩

First be sure to have good structural alignment and a solid stance so that the body is centred and balanced. The weight goes down and becomes



the foundation of our physical activity. The more we sink internally and relax, the better and more agile we will become. Standing simply without any special posture is one of the most powerful Zhan Zhuang positions, so do not skip this phase. Sometimes one minute is enough, sometimes up twenty minutes is needed to settle the mind/body and to become aware of our body - before we can really start.

2) Activating the Eight Extraordinary Channels - Qi Jing Ba Mi 奇經八脈 / Starting the Small Circuit - Xiao Zhou Tian 小周天

Starting with the classic Ren-Du meridians conscious breathing, let's go to perceiving Zhong Mai up to the heart and Dai Mai around the waist (our natural bellows), and everything opens and closes. In my experience, it's more about a general feeling of heat or presence rushing through the body rather than looking for the single meridians. This gives us the sensation of our torso expanding and contracting in all directions and helps our general feeling of natural Kai He (opening and closing) via the crown of the head (baihui) and perineum (huiyin). The back and front of the torso become progressively solid, strong and active. Then we move through the other four meridians crossing our body (qiao and wei), connecting our hands (laogong) and feet (yongquan), and feeling the expansion in all directions inside of arms and legs.

3) Going to the Great Circuit - Da Zhou Tian 大周天 / Connecting Sky, Earth and



Man - Tian Di Ren 天地人

When we activate the Greater Circulation, the feeling moves through the whole body with specific emphasis on arms and legs, hands and feet, which get warmer or start to tingle, toes and fingers feeling spread apart, all of the joints have an energy of expansion and solidifying at the same time. Nothing becomes rigid, but the flow of consciousness – like the tide – brings a little more strength at every passage. It's like the tempering of steel, hot and cold alternates until the hardening occurs. Now we have built the Man, the Yin Yang that can manage Sky and Earth, which means: we are able to withstand gravity, expand into the sky, and keep our balance as we adapt and move.

4) Feeling the Body as a Whole - Hun Yuan Ting Jin 魂圓听勁

We could think that all this is already included in the Da Zhou Tian phase, but in reality, this process takes a little longer to manifest inside our body - like a new application. The perception of every single micropart of our body and the ability to expand from there with the feeling of being full in a vertical and horizontal manner. After having developed the vertical structure of Da Zhou Tian, the spiritual path is the next step. Body and mind are alert and receiving information from around ourselves. Cultivating this state of high awareness helps us also in our two-person training. Every breath works to connect all parts.

5) Open and Close All Directions - Ba Mian Kai He 八面開合

The real engine, as we know from breathing, is opening and closing, inhaling and exhaling. Full and empty, moving between these two states is the best isometric work you can practice on a subtle level. As long as we expand and contract every millimetre of our body in a rhythmic way to the point where we can feel the physical limits of our structure (muscles, internal organs, back, legs, arms, etc), we are growing consciousness' power. Awareness and power go together because at a nervous system level the act of feeling empowers, stimulates and modifies muscles activity. Eight directions are the known six - plus inwards and outwards.

6) Breathing with the Skin - Pifu Huxi 皮肤呼吸 / Going to Fascia - Jinmo 筋膜

The next step to expand our force inward and outward to bring our perception and attention to the skin, our external barrier and limit. The goal is to feel the breath moving over the skin on the entire body. Self-perception allows the mind to observe every area of the skin and increases

consciousness. The process later slowly moves from skin into the fascia layer under the skin and connects the whole body in a way that differs



from the muscles and tendons, into inner arms, inner legs and into and around the organs in the torso. Fascia wraps all organs physically and energetically and gives a subtle connection to the whole structure.

7) Into Muscles and Tendons - Yi Jin 易筋 / Filling/Cleaning the Bones - Xi Sui 洗髓

At this point we can start to sink our feelings (mind power) from skin and fascia into tendons, ligaments and muscles, and feel how these sensations interact with our muscles in terms of power and our expansion in terms of ligaments. It's an active process where we monitor our body to see and feel results, but in a gentle way. The process takes some time to manifest itself fully, but has the side effect of expanding the comfort zone and filling the muscles and tendons with new energy. The same process occurs in the bone marrow; filling/cleaning, where in the previous work we went into the marrow with our

intention and condensed it into different forms of reactions: heat, vibrations, emotions and/or other reactions.

8) Spontaneously - Zi Ran 自然

Returning to empty is always the last stage in every alchemical process, where the process is cleaned and purified. The process has to take care of itself and become natural and spontaneous, it



has to become pure, with no intention or effort from the doer. Practicing accumulates – not consistently, but in a random way – our power. Just pretend you are doing nothing and practice. The best image I can think of is the harmonious flight of a crane, where our body moves connected and full naturally but not stiff. From here repeat forms 1 to 7. This is what happens inside when we practice Xiao Yi Jin Jing.

A last note. Our brain works in a unique way. If you believe you can, you can. If you don't believe you can, you can't. Just do your exercises and that's all. After a certain time, answers will come.

Book Reviews

WILD COLONIAL BOY: TALES OF A KUNG FU COP

BY DAN DOCHERTY

REVIEWED BY MARNIX WELLS

Here is an unvarnished account of a career working in the Far East, namely Hong Kong, while it was still British. Unusually, it is presented in the attractive format of one- or two-page vignettes, with occasional apposite snapshots, ideal for dipping into and savouring at leisure. Having worked in what Dan acknowledges to have been a highly corrupt police force, though ameliorated by a transparent court of law and press, Dan spares no details of his interactions with the social underside. In his own unassuming way, he bares his soul for us. Although written in the first person, the style is as of a birds-eye view, objective but engaging, somewhat like Caesar's *Gallie Wars*.

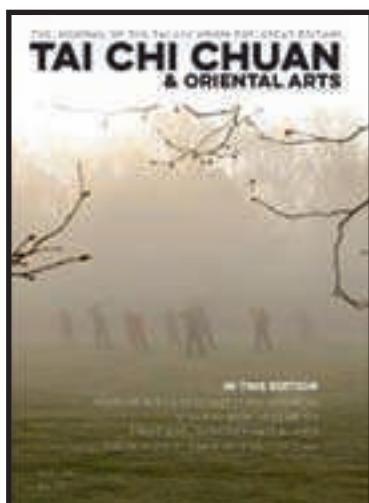
Spiced with the occasional Latin or French tag, we learn of Dan's policing and martial adventures, told in dead-pan manner without fear or favour, not without a touch of laconic humour. He was perhaps a classic example of how Scots often formed the backbone of empire and commonwealth. Coming from a karate grounding, Dan early divined the way forward for his martial interests lay in tai chi. At that time, 1975, this meant training in the Far East under a real master. Having answered an advertisement, he secured employment as a police inspector in the Hong Kong.

There he found what he was looking for in the formidable master Cheng Tinhung, of Wu family tai chi and its nei kung (internal qigong) training. From Cheng's school, in 1976, Dan was to become full-contact champion of Hong Kong, and later Malaysia. Yet, underneath this hard-man image, we get glimpses of a graduate in law, scholar of languages, and a humanitarian with strong sense of Justice. In the 1980s, after the era of Mao and 'Gang of Four', Dan relates how he was finally able to tour the mainland and visit Shaolin, then in almost ruinous state, and other sites of martial heritage.



After the conclusion of Dan's narrative, I would add, from personal experience, Dan went on to found his own UK school of tai chi, host annual tai chi tournaments at Oxford, and successfully hold the chairmanship of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain over many years until earlier this year. Meanwhile, Dan authored several notable works on the tai chi classics with martial applications for self-defense. In this memoir Dan allows his admirers, and doubtless also critics, to understand a little more about this enigmatic character and appreciate the breadth of his achievements to date.

BACK ISSUES SALE



TCC NO. 58

Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu
Mind & Body Integration
Traditional European Martial Arts
The Paradox of Training Self-Defense



TCC NO. 57

Grandmaster Sam Chin
Balance & Tai Chi
Taijichuan: The Art of Mind & Body
Metarobics & The Future of Tai Chi

Miss an issue? Want to complete your collection?

1 Copy £2.50
2 Copies £4.50
5 Copies £6.00
10 Copies £8.00

Send your order with a cheque payable to the TCUGB to:

Tai Chi Chuan & Oriental Arts
62A Greenrock Road
Bishopton
Rentrewwshire
PA7 5JB



TCC NO. 56

Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu
The Great Heaven Circuit
Ki and the Upcoming Year
QiGong for Health



TCC NO. 55

You, Your Mind, & Taiji
Discovering Professor Li Deyin
Tai Chi Caledonia, The Beginning
The Senses as Embodied Knowledge



TCC NO. 54

11th Competition for Tai Chi Chuan
Brush Knee or Push
Medical Tai Chi
Movements of Heat and Mind

NEVER MISS ANOTHER ISSUE! PURCHASE AN ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION OF

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN & ORIENTAL ARTS

WWW.TAICHIUNION.COM/MAGAZINES/