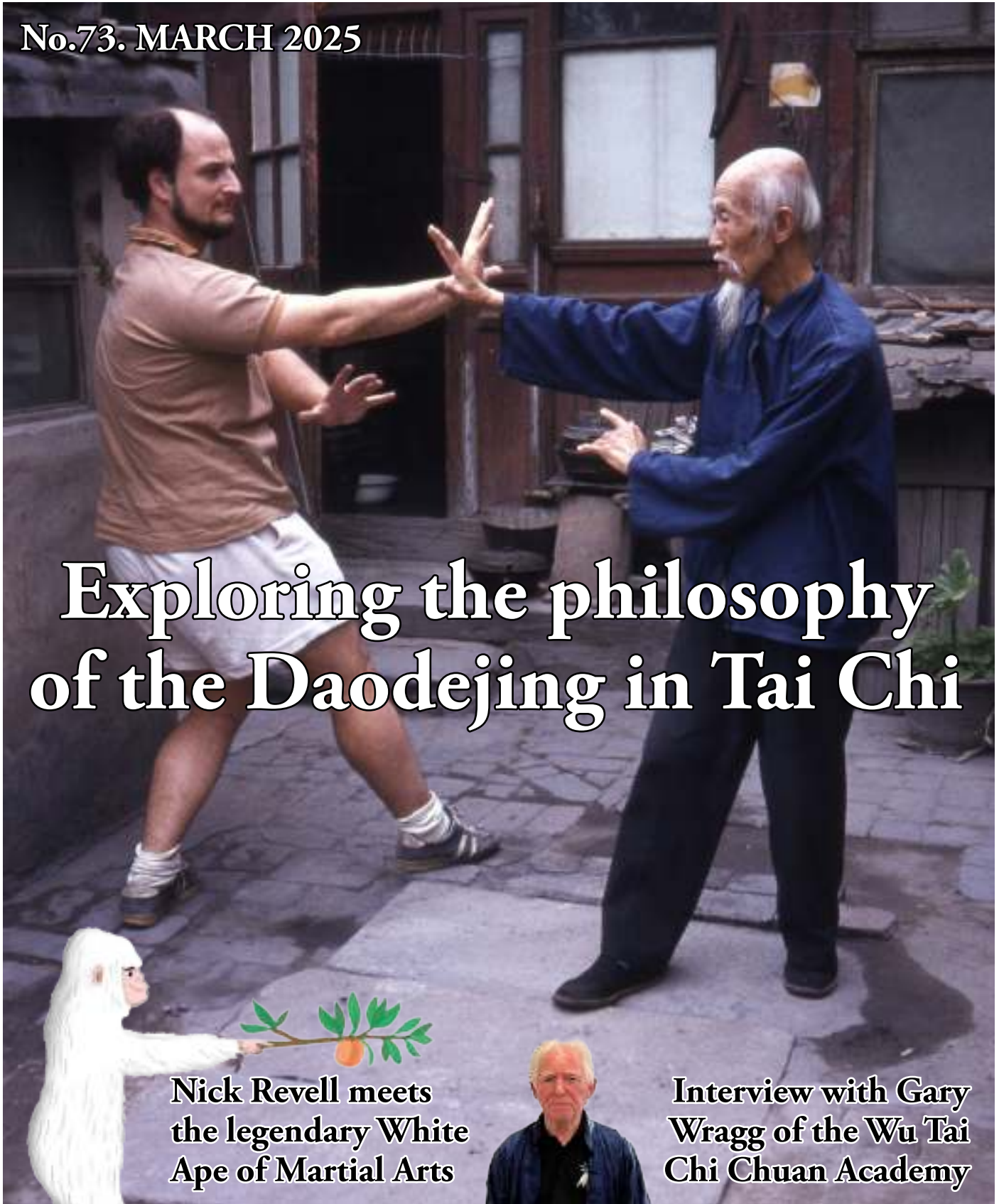




# TAI CHI

## INTERNAL ARTS

No.73. MARCH 2025



# Exploring the philosophy of the Daodejing in Tai Chi

**Nick Revell meets  
the legendary White  
Ape of Martial Arts**



**Interview with Gary  
Wragg of the Wu Tai  
Chi Chuan Academy**



# TAI CHI CALEDONIA

A week of  
**Tai Chi & Chinese Internal Arts**  
in the heart of **Scotland**  
**Friday 4 - Friday 11 July 2025**

## Teachers

Yanira Rodriguez, Paul Silfverstrale, Frederic Plewniak, James Carss, Dee Swift,  
Harriet Devlin, Gordon Faulkner, Mauro Bertoli, Severin Berz, Katrin Blumenberg, Tammy Bliss,  
Sergio Uzzo & Simona Longeri



Booking Options & Programme Details visit:  
[www.taichicaldonia.com](http://www.taichicaldonia.com)

Get in touch:  
[bookings@taichicaldonia.com](mailto:bookings@taichicaldonia.com) Tel: 07834953006





# THE RANGE AND DEPTH OF THE INTERNAL ARTS

by Ken Symon, Editor

This issue of the magazine acts as a window on the breadth and depth of the internal arts.

Our main features include an interview with Gary Wragg, senior representative of the Wu Family in Europe conducted over chrysanthemum tea at the Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Bethnal Green, London. It was great to meet such a senior Wu stylist who I have heard of for many years. Visiting such a space dedicated to the teaching of Tai Chi Chuan gladdened my heart.

A new translation of the Daodejing is an event and I am delighted to publish the article from Alan Peatfield who has done just that with the work including commentary based the oral teachings of the Daoist Water tradition from Master Bruce Frantzis. It begs the question of how much there is a spiritual element of our practice of the arts.

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This issue features an illustration from award-winning designer and Tai Chi player Nila Aye.

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On that subject I was struck by this comment from Stuart Alve Olson's biography of Tai Chi Master T. T. Liang (*Steal My Art*, North Atlantic Books) which I have been re-reading. In the introduction, he wrote of his dislike of "the pseudo-spiritual T'ai Chi community's obsession with making more of 'masters' than they actually are. T'ai Chi normally, in and of itself, is not a very high vehicle for spiritual development, unless practised in conjunction with serious



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The improbable entrance to Gray Wragg's Academy

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meditation. Rarely have I seen any evidence in the vast majority of so-called 'T'ai Chi masters' of any great spiritual enlightenment." Food for thought.

The role of the internal art Yiquan in the training of blind athletes in Switzerland is featured in a fascinating piece by Joelle Meir. It is the first of an occasional series on working with people with physical challenges.

As someone who has worked as a journalist all my professional life, I am a words person. But as an editor I know that so much of what makes magazines and books etc work are pictures and design. I am delighted

in this issue to feature an illustration from award-winning designer and Tai Chi player Nila Aye, calligraphy from Jonathan Skelton and photographs including from this magazine's late, great editor Ronnie Robinson. While on that point, I must apologise for missing the credit for the fantastic photograph that graced the cover of the last magazine. The all-action photograph of Paul Silverstrale in mid-throw was taken by Jane Launchbury.

Enjoy the magazine. I hope you find something in it to deepen your knowledge and practice.



# TAI CHI

## INTERNAL ARTS



## Enjoy the benefits of Tai Chi Internal Arts Membership

You will be joining probably the largest UK organisation representing Tai Chi Chuan and other Chinese Internal Arts, such as Baguazhang, Xingyiquan and Qigong.

We represent a wide spectrum of views and approaches to the arts. We strive to bring together practitioners and teachers and support the development of the arts. We offer two membership options, starting at £35 per year.

### Ordinary Membership

Open to anyone interested in Tai Chi Internal Arts, whether you are merely curious, attending classes or an experienced teacher.

### Instructor Membership

Being a registered Union Instructor give you recognition with the public, other practitioners and students. As well as receiving the Ordinary Membership benefits, you will have access to Union grants and support. You'll need to undertake an assessment to meet our standards.

### Membership Benefits

- Tai Chi Internal Arts Magazine (Published 3 times a year. Print and online versions available)
- Practical Support
- Discount on events
- Free T-Shirt\*
- Exclusive Clothing
- Promote Your Books and DVDs
- Access to Members Forum
- Regular newsletters

### Additional Instructor Membership Benefits

- Free Website Listing
- Personalised Web Page
- Event Promotion (on TCIA website & Facebook)
- Gerda Geddes Fund
- Sponsorship for events & projects promoting Tai Chi Internal Arts and the Union

\* A free T-shirt is offered when joining and at renewal.

Find out more at [www.taichiunion.com](http://www.taichiunion.com)



# What are Tai Chi Internal Arts?

Towards the end of 2024, we changed our trading name to reflect our wide remit, put in place by the founding members. We respect all recognised styles of Internal Arts, but what do we mean by Tai Chi Internal Arts?

At the 2023 Members Meeting, we said we would help educate members and the public, so we've dedicated our column to giving our perspective.

This is designed to be accessible to all, so may include detail that some may already know. We hope you find it informative and interesting, and it prompts you to learn more about the wider Union family to which we all belong. With particular thanks to Training and Education Director Colin Hamilton for his insights.

## **Board of Directors**

*The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain C.I.C*

### **What do we mean by 'internal'?**

The Chinese Internal Arts, such as Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan), Bagua Zhang, Xing Yi Quan, Liu He Ba Fa and some types of Qigong, are characterised by a focus of the mind on internal aspects of the body. Whether they are practised as martial arts for self-protection from outside influences, or as health practices for self-protection against illness and disorder within, they all follow certain key principles that give rise to what can be described as energy or 'chi' (Qi) flowing smoothly through the whole body.

### **What makes a martial art 'internal'?**

Unlike more 'external' fighting systems that might rely mostly on physical strength, the internal martial arts train the body to be soft yet resilient, relaxed yet very powerful, using energy and whole-body connectedness rather than hard, muscular force. There is a whole, rich science underlying these forms of movement and self-defence. Rather than focusing mainly on the strength of the major muscle groups, internal martial arts practitioners may develop an awareness of the



Colin Hamilton

connective tissues, or fascia, that connect everything together and so may come to develop a kind of springy resilience as all the parts of the body work together in a fluid harmony resembling the flow of water through hosepipes or the coiling of a string of pearls, giving rise to strength and flexibility.

These underlying qualities are to be found in Tai Chi Chuan (Supreme Ultimate Fist), Bagua Zhang (Eight Trigram Palm), Xing Yi Quan (Form-Mind Boxing) and Liu He Ba Fa Chuan (Six Combinations Eight Methods Boxing or Water Boxing). Each has some unique qualities, practices and strategies that make them highly effective martial arts in their own right, yet they all have a foundation of whole-body connectedness and therefore there is considerable overlap between them.

That's not to say that they are necessarily superior to other, more 'external', martial arts, it's just that the focus may be different at the various stages of their training. Practitioners of more external styles and systems may begin with hardness yet gradually become softer and more internally focused as they progress through the higher

gradings. An internal martial art begins with that internal awareness; indeed Tai Chi may start off so soft and slow that it is hard to even see that it is designed for fighting, and it's very slowness and softness make it accessible to many people who enjoy it for that reason only and gain considerable health and other benefits from doing so without ever exploring its martial aspects at all.

Yet appearances can be deceptive. After patient training of the breath, body and mind, and a deepening understanding of the underlying principles, the Tai Chi practitioner, if trained correctly, may develop a pliant, coiling, dynamic kind of strength and can use it at speed if necessary. In that way, internal and external styles may find some common ground, as both may, eventually, lead to the discovery and appreciation of their own internal power and the ability to conserve their energy or release explosive force at will.

Some of these qualities are also to be found in non-martial internal arts practices such as Qigong or 'energy work' in which practitioners use the mind or intent to move Qi around the body for other purposes including health, healing, fitness, and their general mental, physical and even 'spiritual' well-being.

Since all these practices involve the awareness and utilisation of this Qi energy, they can all be classed as 'internal arts'; and since the key to their mastery is an understanding of some shared principles, and the even deeper philosophy of Yin and Yang and the underlying state of Wu Chi (Wuji), as represented by the famous Tai Chi symbol in our logo, they can all be said to be Tai Chi Internal Arts.

Find out more in our members' books:  
<https://www.taichiunion.com/background-and-history/books/>

# CASTING THE NET

A REGULAR ROUND-UP OF WHAT HAS BEEN CATCHING OUR EYES, EARS AND INTEREST ON ALL THINGS INTERNAL ARTS.



Master Hong (left) was a Taiwanese Master

## DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING, STAND THERE!

We have been listening to a Neijiaquan Podcast on Robert Yu's training with Hong Yi Xiang. Master Hong was a Taiwanese Master who featured in the famous BBC documentary series *Way of the Warrior* and was one of the teachers of Mike Patterson who was interviewed in the last issue of the magazine (*Training Tai Chi as a Combat Art, Issue No 72*). The episode focuses on Master Hong's teaching of Xingyi Chuan whose three-hour classes six days a week Robert Yu said he never missed when he stayed with him for two-and-a-half years.



There is much interesting discussion on standing practices, of making your body strong by letting your body relax and training your intent to move from different parts of your body. In a particular graphic image, one of the speakers talks about softening in standing practice describing it as "going from frozen meat to soft meat."

'Master Hong was a Taiwanese Master who was featured in the documentary series *Way of the Warrior*.'

One of the speakers says: "There's a certain kind of intelligence that you get from doing internal martial arts for a long time. It's not necessarily book smart...and not street smart – while they may also have that – there's an internal intelligence and I think that ideally makes you gentler." It is well worth a listen. [www.theneijiaquanpodcast.com](http://www.theneijiaquanpodcast.com)

## INTELLECTUAL READ ON MARTIAL ARTS...

If you are looking for a thoughtful, indeed highly intellectual read you could do well to look at the Martial Arts



Studies Journal. It describes itself as "a peer-reviewed online open-access academic journal that publishes the highest quality academic work on any aspect of martial arts studies."

The twice-yearly journal was founded by Cardiff-based Paul Bowman and Benjamin N. Judkins. Its papers are not a casual read but provide some fascinating, thoughtful ideas and analysis of different types of martial arts. It has a current call for papers on Theoretical and Conceptual Development in and through Martial Arts Studies. If interested you'll need to be quick because the closing date for submissions is 30 April. <https://mas.cardiffuniversitypress.org>



# THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR TRADITIONAL TAI CHI CHUAN

**SUNDAY 15th JUNE 2025**  
**9.00am - 6.00 pm**

**DISCOUNTS FOR - Early Bird entry (11 May) - TCUGB and ITQF members**  
**Clissold Leisure Centre, 63 Clissold Road, London N16 9EX**  
**Judging Seminar Programme**  
**14th June 2025**

Sponsored by Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy, Bethnal Green, London

www.wustyle-europe.com



## FRESH INSIGHTS INTO PUSH HANDS EVENT...

Taiji-forum.com run by Hannover-based Nils Klug contains a lot of information that is good to dip into.

Our eye was caught particularly on our last visit by a section on stepping in Tai Chi which you should look at to help work on that area of your practice. There is much there in the form of video and blog to interest including details of the planned teaching at this year's Push Hands Hannover event (see report on the 2024 event in *Tai Chi Internal Arts* issue 72). Taiji-forum.com

## WISDOM FROM THE YANG FAMILY SECRETS...

Our 'From the Classics' this time is taken from *T'ai-chi Touchstones: Yang Family Secret Transmissions*.

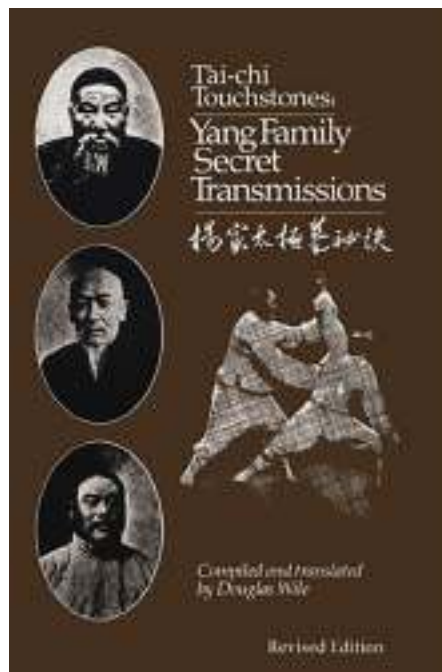
The book was compiled and translated by Douglas Wile and this version published by Sweet Ch'i Press. There is so much Tai Chi

wisdom in the book that it is worth reading and pondering often. This particular excerpt comes from the *Songs of the Eight Ways* attributed to T'an Meng-hsien; a renowned Tai Chi Master known for his knowledge of the classics.

### From the Classics

How can we explain the energy of Ward-Off?  
It is like water which supports a moving boat  
First make the ch'i in the t'an tien substantial  
Then hold the head as if suspended from above.  
The whole body has the power of a spring.  
Opening and closing should be clearly defined  
Even if the opponent uses a thousand pounds of force,  
We will float lightly and without difficulty

**The Song of Ward-off (attributed to T'an Meng Hsien)**



# EVENTS

FOR MORE TAI CHI EVENTS AND ADDITIONAL DETAILS OF THOSE LISTED,  
VISIT [WWW.TAICHIUNION.COM/EVENT-CALENDAR](http://WWW.TAICHIUNION.COM/EVENT-CALENDAR)

## 5 Snake Method Seminar

**Saturday 5 April**

Hove, East Sussex

This half day seminar aims to offer *"the tools, mindset and method for you to make your Tai Chi into a flowing, dynamic and spontaneous martial art."*

It is open to all styles, all levels and practitioners of related arts. More info at [www.5snake.co.uk](http://www.5snake.co.uk)

**Cost £60**

Contact: Nick Walser

Email:

[contact@5snake.co.uk](mailto:contact@5snake.co.uk)



## Squares and Corners, Sizheng and Siyu

**Saturday 26 - Sunday 27 April**

Brighton, London & Southeast

Sam Masich offers a deep dive into these core concepts of Tai Chi Chuan. The event will explore traditional approaches to the 'four squares and four corners theory'. A mix of solo and partner work, the workshop will also provide the foundation for an event on 'long energy' planned later in the year.

There is also a standalone Friday evening 25th April event on The Three Dantiens.

**Cost £200 (Sat - Sun) or £220 (includes Friday event).**

Contact: Simon Robins

Email: [office@taichiandinternalarts.com](mailto:office@taichiandinternalarts.com)



## Adv Training Day (Monthly)

**Sunday 13 April**

Weoley Hill, Bournville, Birmingham



The three-hour long sessions aim to give instructors time for their own training and for advanced students to develop a deeper understanding of Tai Chi.

**Cost £60**

Contact: Mark Peters

Email: [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk)

## Yang Family Qigong Workshop

**Thursday 17 April**

Online course (based in Midlands)



This half-day workshop will focus on the Yang Family Baduanjin as taught by Master Liang He Ching. Those booking will receive training notes plus access to a video of the session.

**Cost £35 (£5 off for members)**

Contact: Mark Peters

Email: [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk)

## South West Push Hands Event

**Sunday 6 April**

Park Wood Rise, Devon, South West

A regular open meeting for free push hands. Everyone is welcome from all styles and levels of experience. There is no teaching at the event, just sharing. Ten minutes push with each partner before changing and agreeing with the new partner on how you want to play.

**Cost £3**

Contact: Duncan Price

Email: [Duncan.price@gmail.com](mailto:Duncan.price@gmail.com)



## Tai Chi Caledonia

**Friday 4 - 11 July**

Stirling, Scotland

Teachers from Europe and the Americas offer courses from beginner to adept in a range of Tai Chi styles and other internal arts. There are also early morning classes in Bagua Zhang or Qigong and evening open push hands sessions.

**Week Ticket from £705**

Contact: Aileen Mandić

Email: [bookings@taichicalledonia.com](mailto:bookings@taichicalledonia.com)

