

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI & QIGONG UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN

& INTERNAL ARTS

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Ba Duan Jin

The slow approach

The beginning

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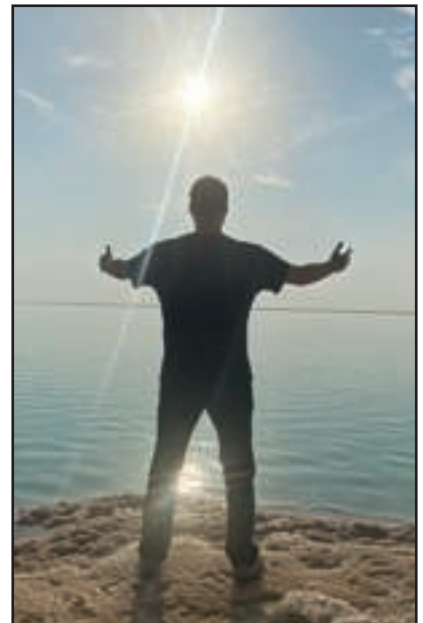
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Comment



I guess we have all had one, at one time or another. The guy, (usually it's a man) who walks into the class and expects tai chi – or qigong – to cure whatever horrible ailment they have. I had not been teaching long. I was working at the academy where I first learned tai chi, a quite fit looking youngish man – 40s probably – came into my class one morning and said: “I did phone, they said I could start today.” So I asked the usual question we all must ask of a new student: ‘Do you have any problems that I should know about?’ “Yes,” he replied, “I have kidney cancer.”

I have to say I was a bit taken aback. He wasn't having treatment, didn't want chemo therapy, he had heard that tai chi was the thing that would cure him. I dealt with him as best I could. Later that morning the master turned up. To say he was not impressed is an understatement and he and the student spent a long time in the office.

He came to the class for about three weeks and the last I heard he went to Jamaica to get a herbal treatment. I have no idea of the ultimate outcome.

This is a problem for anyone who teaches. The myth that energy work can cure disease when what the person needs is a good old fashioned antibiotic. My usual approach these days is: ‘It can't cure, for some things you need conventional treatments. What it will do is heal. By which I mean that it will make you feel better about yourself and less worried about whatever your problem is.’

It is quite a responsibility. We want to promote tai chi and qigong as beneficial to health. We can't, we mustn't, make promises that tai chi can't keep. Anyone who has been practising at a reasonable level knows the feeling of well being that goes with it. But how do you convey this to a new student? I met someone at an industry lunch recently, (the day-job, not tai chi,) and the topic of tai chi came up, as it tends to. He told me that he had had some major surgery a few years ago and that tai chi had been part of his recovery. “I didn't believe in it,” he said, “I just did it because they told me it would help and the hall was pretty close to where I live. Then, after about a year, one day, it suddenly all made sense, I got it. I was hooked.”

You can't tell somebody that, you can't teach it. It's what makes dealing with the health aspect of tai chi so hard.

John Roper

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Continue to improve

As we write our usual update for the magazine, we are finalising our preparations for the members' meeting on 25th November and reflecting on the year behind us. If you missed the meeting then we are planning on putting the presentation on our website along with notes from the meeting. We know that for many Covid still casts a long shadow be that grief at the loss of those we care about or the struggle to rebuild classes in such difficult economic conditions.

Having delivered on our commitments from the last meeting as well as other changes, looking ahead we constantly challenge ourselves to understand what additional support members may like from their union through these times.

The improvements of the last 12 months have been well received and whilst we are aware of other ideas from the Facebook forums and your emails, we will be asking our members what else they would like to have. We will listen and look for assistance to see what is achievable. If you suggest an idea, be aware we may come back to ask you how to implement it.

Of course, none of this could be achieved without the support team who actually do the work. It may surprise you to know that we have just one part-time employee, the amazing Aileen Mandic, who keeps the union running on a day-to-day basis and the board on its toes (we think she enjoys this last part of her role a little too much). We are lucky to have a small, dedicated team of volunteers who have contributed thousands of hours at no cost to help implement the changes you have seen. John Roper and Suse Coon deserve a special mention and thanks for producing the magazine with Robin Gamble being a regular writer whose support is very much appreciated.

Continuing to turn the union into a more professional company is going to require more help from people with business skills who can do the work with the priority being

marketing and social media so if you have proven recent experience in these areas watch out for future announcements as we expand our support team. Reliance on significant volunteer goodwill is not a sustainable way to run a company so we will be looking at how we can

afford to have proper contracts in place to fill support team roles and pay the going rate. We have already done this to good effect for the website changes where we have made targeted use of professionals to do specific tasks. The board will remain unpaid volunteers.

We would like to take this opportunity to make you aware that we are rolling out automated electronic renewals and replacing the paper letters and membership

cards with emails and electronic (PDF) certificates for all. It's a good

example of how the invisible work behind the scenes is bringing visible improvements for members. In

this case, investment in new software over the last three years has made it possible to replace the previous

automated but paper-based process.

We have concentrated above on matters within the union but we are very much a community-focused company outwardly looking at how the internal arts can benefit others whether through vigour in baguazhang, xing yi chuan and tai chi chuan, or some slow relaxation from qigong and internal martial arts routines.

It has been heart-warming to hear from Ray Pawlett, Catherine Birkinhead and Phil East about their work within their communities. As a union, we are all privileged to support them and look forward to hearing from more of you about how the Gerda Geddes Fund can benefit those around us.

Finally, we wish all of you a peaceful Christmas season and hope the months ahead bring contentment and calm. We look forward to working with more of you in the year ahead. 🇬🇧





Dmitry Sokolik – in the beginning

Let's play



Tai chi is a partnered art. In an age where the human touch is being driven out of everyday life, we should revel in the partnered play of tai chi. But I think many people are scared to do this, worried about injury, or not wishing to associate themselves with 'fighting', writes Nick Walser

There was apparently a note on the original manuscript of the tai chi classics, describing Chang San Feng's intentions: "He desired the whole world to attain longevity, and not only martial techniques."

I don't believe that the founders of tai chi intended for 'the youth to do martial practice, and the elders to do handform only'.

My contention is this: in tai chi, we have a martial art that is purposely intended for older people. Not just as solo movements, and not just as very gentle pushing hands. This is tai chi as a free-flowing, dynamic partnered game of strikes, parries, locks, knees and more.

It is this game that Chang San Feng intended us to play as tai chi.

There is a hint given in the classics as to the overall purpose of tai chi: "The spectacle of an old person defeating a group of young people, how can it be due to swiftness?"

Leaving the poetic licence of this aside how indeed can an older person succeed? Surely older people will easily get injured? And surely many older people aren't strong or fast enough to play these sorts of games?

Luckily, tai chi is designed to allow us to play a martial arts game with little fear of injury or mishap.

According to Chen Wei Ming, Yang Cheng Fu said the following: "...tai chi free fighting is different from other arts because it is based on adherence and listening whereas the free fighting of the other martial arts lacks these sensibilities." In short, tai chi is used up close.

Being in contact paradoxically makes training safer because we can feel the attacks, rather than having to judge them visually, and are therefore more likely to intercept them. In our practice, we maintain continuous connection with our opponent (this differs from the current qi-based fashion of shoving the opponent away into empty space). This close-up way of working serves to limit the power that can be brought to bear in any technique.

We combine this with the fact that tai chi trains precise, light and measured movements.

These attributes are perfect for ensuring we do not injure our opponents, by delivering all the techniques that tai chi offers, but with care and control: qualities of the seasoned martial artist, and a way of embodying the famed tai chi precept of 'invest in loss'.

As we improve, we build the ability to flow. Flow in turn

builds rapport and awareness, further lessening the chance of unexpected blows.

At ages 50 and 43, my training partner Ian and I could hardly be considered old. But we are thinking about the next 20 or 30 years, and what this looks like as martial artists.

We have been inspired in part by a man named Bobby Taboada, a Filipino martial arts instructor. He can be seen on YouTube, moving with grace and skill. He is in his mid-70s. Does he hit as hard as a younger man? Probably not. Can he do all that his younger students can? Probably not. Can he play meaningfully within his martial arts style, and test his opponents? Undoubtedly.

I think that more is possible at these middle and later ages than we give credit for. Let's keep playing, let's keep exploring and testing ourselves and our tai chi friends, for as long as possible.

Many of us possess the basics. Fixed step pushing hands is a good basis for partnered practice but it does not express anything other than the most basic qualities of tai chi. We can get much more creative. And have much more fun. 🇨🇦



For inspiration, please check out our YouTube channel Greysteel Tai Chi @greysteeltaichi3940. Our intention is for others to try out the method of training offered in the videos, and to provide us with feedback, criticism and comments. So watch it, try it, and get in touch.

Following on from my introduction to ba duan jin qigong in issue No 68 I would like to share the individual postures and movements of the system so you can build a solid practice and gain insight into its separate components



Supporting the sky is the first movement of the ba duan jin qigong. It is also commonly referred to as 'pressing the heavens', 'raising the hands to heaven' or 'lifting the sky'. For this article I prefer to use 'supporting' as this is the intent I would like to work with. The qualities of the movement support the whole body, so I feel it fits just right. The action is always in the name.

I like to think of this movement as the one that 'gets the motor running'. You could think of it as similar to that amazing full body stretch and yawn that we often experience first thing in the morning. There is a great element of awakening the body, infusing the cells with fresh oxygen and expelling the stagnant qi, or stale air, as we exhale. It activates the whole body and creates an overall opening of the three major core sections or jiao.

For some of us it may have been a while since we experienced a full and fruitful morning yawn. Let's face it ... it does feel amazing and one of the most natural actions we perform. Wringing out the body has many immediate benefits. Usually we only do it once, which is enough to get us up and moving, but imagine actively doing it ten to 12 times every morning, or even 12 more times in the evening, then the benefits are huge. I always find it quite amusing that I seem to get benefits from just watching cats stretch. And to be fair, without a doubt, cats are the world's best stretchers. That's what keeps them lively and vibrant.

As we gently extend through the body from the feet to the palms, we are able to separate the spaces between the

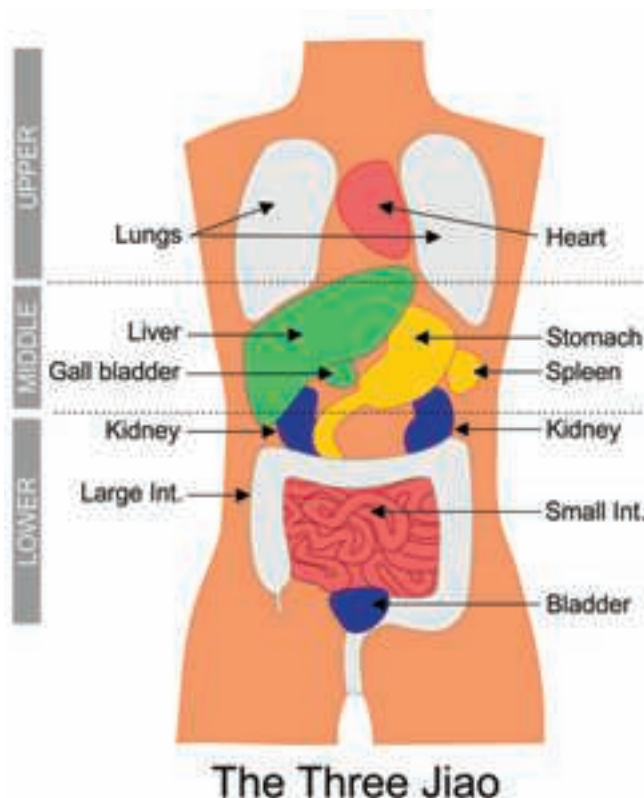


'Support the sky'

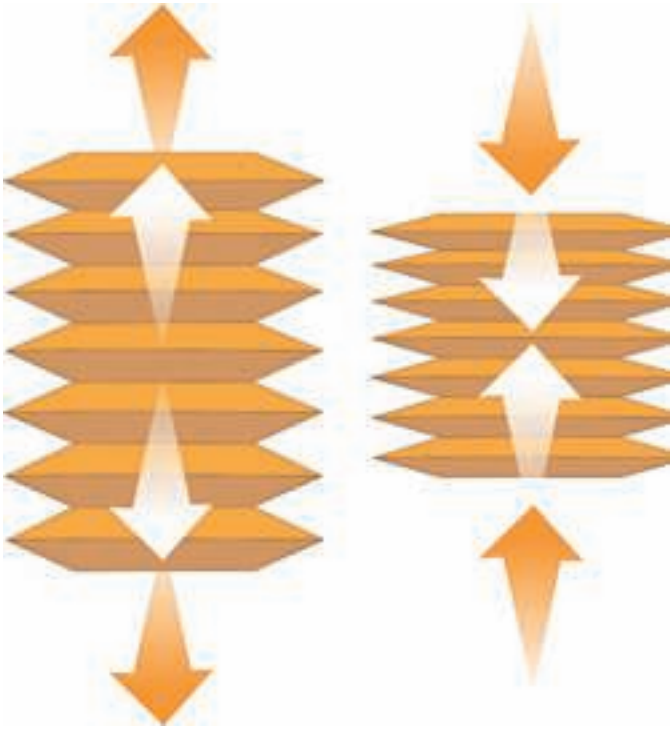
internal organs by re-ordering and reconnecting the fascia that becomes settled during sleep. Opening the pathways and creating space for blood, fluids and elimination help to maintain harmony and efficiency. When we release at the palms at the peak of the movement, we allow the natural gravity of the body to return downward, guiding the qi to sink and bringing the internal environment to rest.

This action of opening and closing, extending and condensing, performs a very valuable internal massage, like a concertina or bellow effect for the three cavities and their respective organs. This will improve the functions of the whole body, increase nutrient uptake and help to promote the efficient elimination of waste. When we connect into the movement and breathe, there is a noticeable rhythm to it, internally.

Supporting the sky is beneficial for all aspects of the body but most importantly for reducing tension around the organs and assisting the internal working of the body. The movement is a great preparation for any energy work or health practices and can be used as a simple stand-alone



The Three Jiao



practice in its own right. It has a good balance of both upward yang and downward yin energy.

If you are mindful that you are supporting the sky with this movement, it will allow you to remain soft and pliable throughout. Supporting has a compassionate and trustworthy quality.

As you reach the hands above the head, gently allow all the body tissues to open from the feet right up to the hands. Take your time. Then release any tension in the tissues and return to the start position.

Variations for all to enjoy

Do it seated. You can perform the movement in a seated position. Make sure the feet are flat on the ground and the knees above the ankles.

Do it lying down. Performing this posture while lying down is perfect for waking the body in the morning, you don't even need to open your eyes. If you suffer with anxiety, depression, grief or physical pain, you'll know that thoughts can often invade the mind on waking. Try this ten times as soon as you wake, it will help those thoughts to flow without sticking so much.

- Extend the toes, gently pointing away as you inhale. Relax as you exhale.
- Push the heels away as you inhale. Relax as you exhale.
- Raise up the arms and reach up or away as you extend the toes and inhale. Relax as you exhale.
- (Alternative) Squeeze the fists as you extend the toes and inhale. Relax the feet and hands as you exhale.

An additional tip to this practice is to only use 50% of your effort in good health. If your health and wellness is being challenged at present, then start with a very gentle 10% and work your way up as your energy increases. There is no rush, take your time.

Cautions: Raising the hands above the head may increase blood pressure so be careful if you suffer from hypertension. Do not force the movement but allow it to happen naturally.

Ba duan jin 1 - practise

1. Stand in shoulder-width stance.



Christopher Handbury

2. Gather both hands in front of the navel, palms facing upward.
3. Raise the palms upward in front of the chest.
4. Rotate your hands and forearms as they pass over the face so the palms face upward.
5. Push gently towards the sky as if supporting the sky like a soft sheet of cotton or cloud.
6. Rotate your wrists so that the palms face downward and relax the shoulders.
7. Lower your elbows and then hands gently in front of the body, palms facing down.
8. When your arms have reached the full extent, turn the hands to face upward.
9. Begin to gather your palms upward ready to repeat the movement.
10. Repeat for 8 to 16 times.
11. Return to the centre, gather your hands at the centre of the navel one on top of each other and relax the breath.

Try to spend some time with the movement over a few weeks and really allow it to sink into the body and mind. Once you have connected to the practice you can move on to the next ba duan jin or continue with your own methods. If you require additional help, there is a full video of this practice on YouTube at Chris Handbury Qigong.

Sometimes the simplest qigong postures are the most powerful so enjoy every minute as your body adjusts to the posture and begins to transform. You may even feel the movement change shape with regular dedication. Best of luck. 🍀

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so says the old Chinese proverb about tai chi chuan

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Taking it slow

Mike DeMarco

Student Debra Rivera deflecting Mike's strike. Practicing applications help improve the accuracy of solo routine practice.

Like any other martial art, tai chi is viewed through several lenses. The most common images are of elderly practitioners exercising in parks at dawn or of youthful gymnasts in ostentatious uniforms seeking a gold trophy for a solo routine. In recent years, another image is coming into focus. It is that of the master who can use tai chi as a true martial art. However, most people attempting to illustrate tai chi's effectiveness are rarely convincing. Their performances are often prearranged, appearing to be functional only because the opponent cooperates. When tested in the ring, as against a mixed martial artist for example, the so-called tai chi master is humiliated

As a martial art practitioner or researcher, tai chi should be understood for all its facets: an exercise, a sport, and a seemingly ineffective combat system. Even the majority of tai chi teachers acknowledge that tai chi as practised today is impractical for self-defence. There are many reasons for this conclusion, but is this conclusive? Is the assessment accurate?

Tai chi update

There are an estimated 300 million tai chi practitioners worldwide. Most are practising a slow-motion routine, often simplified, as a mode of exercise to nourish their health. We can't expect that someone whose sole aim at practising tai chi for health will have any martial skills. A smaller number who practise tai chi as a sport may show an impressive form but usually do not delve deeply into combat usage. Their performances are most often solo empty-hand or weapons routines and sometimes duets. Instructors teaching tai chi for health or sport may be very knowledgeable in their area of expertise, but often lack any real combat experience.

During and before the nineteenth century there were very few tai chi practitioners and only a handful of masters. Even though there are millions of practitioners today, the number of real masters has not grown proportionately and remains small, like a unicorn we hear about but never see. In modern times, the formerly secret art of tai chi became public, taught mainly for health while the martial skills were neglected.

However, it is important to recognise that, just because tai chi is practised for health or sport doesn't mean that it is useless as a martial art. It only means that most have not learned how to use it as a practical fighting method. So what are we missing?

Practical tai chi

Historical records show that tai chi was well-known for its high efficiency as a martial art. It was used by

bodyguards, bank caravan guards, and taught to the imperial bodyguards and military men during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). Others, men and women, studied tai chi for its practical usage during the violent periods in Chinese history. They were not interested in learning tai chi for health or as a sport. They wanted to learn it because of its supreme position among the many Chinese martial arts of the time. It was for their survival.

What made tai chi so practical as a martial art was the progressive training methods devised from the beginner up to the highest level. The goal is not to accumulate many techniques, but to learn how to move most efficiently. One cannot 'make' a natural movement. It must be discovered through proper practice.

Initially, students practise slowly in a relaxed manner. This allows one to learn and ensures that no injuries occur during practice. The slow method is prescribed in order to discover how the body can move efficiently. As the student progresses by learning techniques and improving coordination, he or she moves on to other training methods. Routines are performed with greater speed. Applications give insight into why the movements take shape in the solo forms.

The solo routines help practitioners to learn about their own body movement and mental state. Two-person practices help one learn about the opponent through hands-on sensitivity. Many are fascinated by the two-person practice of push-hands (tuishou), where two people face each other in the quest for getting the other off-balanced, pushed, or thrown. The practice was designed to safely learn where strengths and weaknesses are in oneself, as well as in the opponent. Basically, two people face each other in a forward stance and touch arms, then try to push or pull the other while their feet remain in a fixed position. A more advanced level of push-hands practice can include strikes and locks. The play is fun, so many practitioners remain at this level. However, they have not yet reached the level of understanding and ability

where their tai chi can become a truly practical, effective martial art.

For any martial system to be effective it must contain a spectrum of techniques for evading and attacking. Superb push-hands skills – effortlessly evading and bouncing opponents away at will – are impressive, but the sweat here is still not sufficient for a street fight.

The logical path of instruction is a progressive system of training that includes realistic sparring. Most tai chi practitioners never participate in this type of training. For the few that do, this step in their training can lead to a highly effective art.

The most common question raised by those who are skeptical of tai chi's practical use is 'How is the slow-motion routine useful for actual self-defence?'

Practising slowly allows both the teacher and student to observe movements and gain awareness of where and how to make improvements. The goal is to discover what it really means to move naturally in an optimal manner. For practical self-defence, the student gradually increases speed.

This side view shows common mistakes, such as leaning and extending the body too far forward. This places unnecessary stress on the body and creates faults in the technique. Notice how his back heel is off the ground. Often these faults result from trying to reach the opponent who is too far away for the proper technique to be effective.



The view from the front allows us to see other faults in the forward push. His elbows are held stiffly out to the sides—a common placement when trying to push with arm power. When the elbows are outward, power from the legs is diffused. His front foot is also pointing slightly to the right, out of alignment with

his waist's direction, further weakening the body structure.

When force meets tension

Seeing an attack coming, Guan Tyng Tan tenses to stop Bill's approach. When Bill makes contact and pushes forward, Guan Tyng's whole body is affected, causing him to go off-balance and his toes to raise. Tension may feel like strength, but here it illustrates a weakness.



Regardless of strength, his stance is also weak for a frontal attack.

Tai chi practice starts by learning and practising the fundamental



routine slowly for a good reason. Practising each move in slow motion allows one to sense where tensions are located. Consciously and unconsciously, the practitioner adjusts so each posture can find its natural alignment. Proper alignment is conducive to issuing power, maintaining balance and coordination. The above examples illustrate that practising slowly can help you notice where tensions arise in the body, especially muscle tensions and joint alignments.

Relaxation is important for tai chi practice. It is a key that allows one to discover how the body can move most effectively. Beginners not only move slowly but must seek deeper and deeper relaxation to allow for full-body coordination. At more advanced levels, the student can execute techniques with great speed, while maintaining relaxation in the body. This allows for lightning quick defensive and offensive techniques to manifest spontaneously.

Stork spreads wings: This is one possible application of this form. Rather than meet the incoming force with force, the author first turns and shifts to the left, away from the attack line. Without stopping, he turns right. The waist movement leads the arms into position, the right arm at guard in front of groin and stomach, and the left forearm against the opponent's incoming arm near his elbow. By shifting back to centre, the author turns his waist, which draws his left elbow to the left, allowing his left forearm to be above the opponent's striking arm. Simultaneously, while the left arm deflects the opponent's arm downward and away, the right hand turns upward, striking to the opponent's face or throat. A front kick can be made in unison with the hand strike, or afterwards.



Jade lady: Guan Tyng Tan sees an opportunity to secure the author's wrist and throw a strike to his mid-section. Rather than attempt to pull away, the author shifts with the tug and turns toward the opponent. This keeps his right arm flexible and brings his left arm toward the attacker's punching arm. Critical here is turning the waist. If the attacker makes contact, the turning while shifting slightly away deflects the punch. If the timing is off, broken ribs or at least bruising will result. However, when the defence is synchronised with the opponent's movement, the left forearm will hit the opponent's arm with great force, not only knocking the opponent's arm away, but spinning him almost 180 degrees. This makes the following push look effortless yet is highly effective.



Wrist Lock: Here is a common wrist lock made after the author grabs Bill's forward wrist. Bill brings his left hand to hold the author's right wrist. Bill then circles his right hand in toward his left side, then upward over the author's wrist. Pointing his fingers downward brings great pain to the author's wrist, causing him to sink toward the ground.



Countering a wrist lock: Why the above lock works so well is because of the instinct to resist the grab. The tensions restrict movement in the arm and intensify the pain felt in the wrist. The counter is easy: just relax. When the attacker grabs the wrist and starts the lock, the counter is made by letting the elbow of the arm being grabbed circle upward, rather than be pulled inward. The attempt of the wrist lock allows one to counter by flowing into another lock that secures both of the opponent's arms and brings him to his knees. The right elbow that secures Guan Tyng's left arm can cause a break if positioned for that purpose.



Limited movements

The number of movements found in tai chi routines is not great. A casual observer sees a relatively small number, but the number can increase dramatically when one learns of multiple usages for each movement, plus additional variations that are not shown in standard routines. Often the high-level applications are not shown publicly. Tai chi students, and even teachers, usually have a limited knowledge of techniques, but this does not mean that tai chi is limited to the range of techniques included in specific routines. The number of techniques is limitless, while the vision of any one practitioner is limited by lack of experience, perception, and the ability to apply tai chi principles to the variety of possible defensive and offensive situations.

One of the most common tai chi techniques is the rollback. The following sequences illustrate the basic rollback and a few of the variations stemming from this one technique. As a Daoist proverb states: "From One comes Ten Thousand Things."

Simple rollback: The rollback is a common technique because it is very practical in deflecting incoming attacks, particularly a punch or push. Stepping outside from the line of attack allows the defender to remain relaxed. First a sidestep and waist turn to the left leads the hands to the outside, and the left leg becomes fully weighted. Then the unweighted right leg steps back, away from the opponent's strike. Following the step back, the waist turns right and directs both arms to the opponent's wrist and elbow.

Supplement: Since the opponent's arm is fully extended, the defender can break his elbow by letting the hands flow into a natural arch (left hand moving rightward as the right hand moves simultaneously back toward the hip).

Rollback with palm strike: After the rollback, various techniques can follow, depending on the attacker's response. In most cases, he may remain in position or move forward or backward after the failed strike. If he over extends or freezes, the defender can immediately shift forward with a palm strike to the face or jaw.



Rollback with eye strike: Rather than simply deflecting

the opponent's strike at the wrist and elbow, an option is to strike directly toward the opponent's eyes with the right. Fast. Simple. Devastating.



Rollback with a throw: There is only a slight difference between a lock, a break, and a throw. Here, the pressures on the attacker's arm follow his forward momentum, bring him further off balance, making for an easy, effective throw. A key element here is to flow in the direction with the attacker's movement.



Rollback with a push: The attacker may instinctively retreat after throwing the punch. The defender does not attempt to pull the attacker forward, but rather follows the attacker's retreat with a two-hand push which adds to the velocity of the attacker's retreating momentum.



Rollback with a lock: In this sequence, the attacker realises his extended arm is susceptible to a break and so he quickly pulls his forearm inward to protect his elbow. In so doing, the defender places his left hand into the elbow's crevice and follows the retreating wrist. Again, the momentum of the attacker's pull aids in a smooth transition into an arm lock. Done while stepping to the back side of the opponent places much strain not only on his elbow, but also into the lower back.



Rollback with a trip: If the attacker overextends, he may continue to step forward. However, the defender can place the arch of his right foot against the opponent's right ankle, or kick in this manner, and it will lead the striker into a head roll to the ground.



Rollback with a reap: Another leg technique is shown here by placing all the weight into the left leg while performing rollback, allowing the right leg to swing behind the attacker. A throw can be executed by reversing the right leg movement, striking the back of the opponent's ankle. The backward leg movement is coupled with a simultaneous forward push against the opponent's chest.



All of the aforementioned techniques start with rollback. From this basic movement a wide variety of applications can follow, such as pushes, throws, locks, and strikes utilising most body parts. It is up to the defender to use techniques suitable for the situation. Many of the more

violent techniques have not been taught in tai chi since the impetus for the spread of the art has been focused on health. Practising with the principles of slowness and relaxation allow for accuracy, balance, and power when movements are done with speed. These principles are also conducive to 'following' an opponent and allow flexibility to spontaneously adjust techniques in situations that are not static.

"We can't expect
that someone
whose sole aim at
practising tai chi for
health will have any
martial skills"

Hopefully this short article brings a lens for viewing tai chi into sharper focus. Any martial art is affected by the goals of those who practise it: health, entertainment, sport, or as a practical fighting art. Many styles are effective, but few are highly effective. It may not be a question of style, but more of intent. To be defined as a real martial art, the training method must be progressive, encompassing ways to nurture the basics and bring practitioners to the higher levels of mastery.

Tai chi is not alone in focusing on slow movement practise and the importance of relaxation. To master any martial art, it is especially important to discover how these two seemingly ineffective principles can be employed both defensively and offensively. 🥋

CREDITS

Photography by Meade Martin.

Bill Bruno and Guan Tyng Tan assisted in photo demonstrations.



"Men and women,
studied tai chi for its
practical usage during
the violent periods in
Chinese history.
They were not interested
in learning tai chi for
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It was for their survival"



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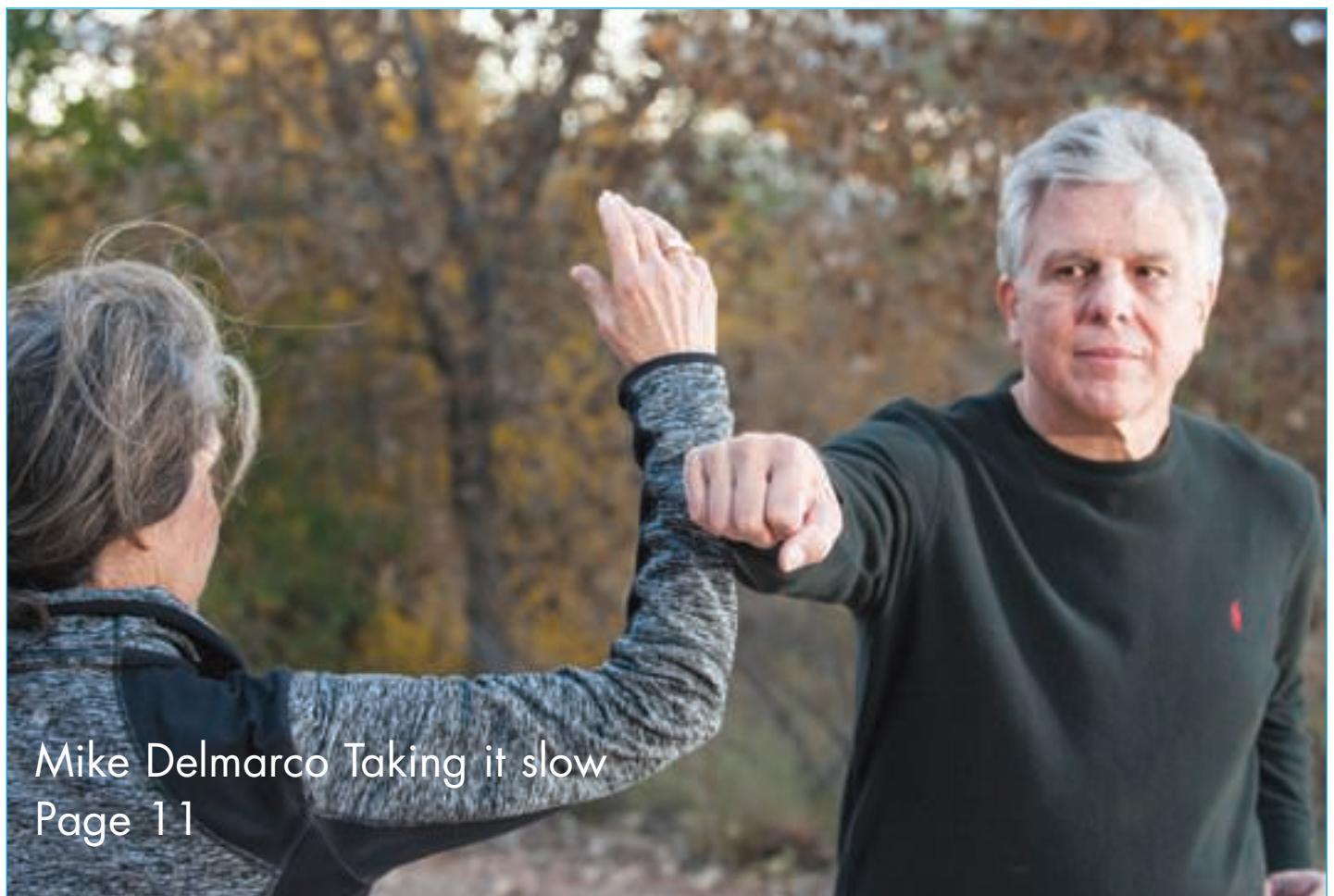
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Mike Delmarco Taking it slow
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The venue, Weoley Hill Village Hall in Birmingham, provides both inside and outside facilities. It was, as usual, an ideal setting with its large flat area of grass at the front. Even the weather was favourable, enabling us to work outside on both days.

The event was extremely well attended, with Kai Ming and Painting the Rainbow (PtR) students joined by a number of other tai chi enthusiasts from across the UK, including some familiar faces from previous years. A few came for one day, but the majority attended for both.

The event was led by Mark Peters who taught in his usual style with professionalism and humour. Mark's lively and enthusiastic manner encouraged all of us, and gave those new to some specific aspects the confidence to 'have a go'. It stretched many to achieve, even though they were outside their comfort zone.

Day One was devoted to the 32 step Yang family broadsword (dao) form. In total six hours of intensive training. Each movement was broken down into easy-to-follow steps, gradually adding the next move. This was new territory to the majority of students and it proved a very challenging day for everyone, both physically and mentally.

We moved through the sequence, continually practising, and having the applications explained to us. As we progressed it became apparent that this was just an introduction: the hard work would come later in perfecting it. One person observed that what they personally got out of the day's training was a sense of the discipline one needs to achieve a high standard in broadsword techniques.

An excellent day concluded with participants tired but buzzing with a sense of personal achievement.

Day two there were over 40 participants all eager to begin. One Kai Ming student commented: "With blue sky

above, surrounded by late summer foliage and fresh green grass underfoot, it was the perfect setting for a day studying tai chi."

In the morning session we studied the basics of push hands – again an aspect of tai chi that was new to a number of people. Mark's humour and enthusiasm helped and encouraged those students not used to partner work or being in close proximity to strangers.

We were led through the basics of push hands techniques and worked on examples of posture, pressure and what effects these would have on us. Many were surprised by their own levels of sensitivity, about their balance, finding their centre and becoming more aware of their partner's energy and intent, and the level of 'softness' that is required to achieve the desired results.

With the afternoon working on the Cheng Man'Ching 37 form, and a concluding session sitting quietly inside with Mark taking us through a series of relaxation exercises, everyone felt the value of the whole day. In fact the last session proved almost too much for some who relaxed so much that they entered a state of 'semi-sleep' – a bonus session rounding off a weekend of activity spent outside in the fresh air.

The consensus among students was that the whole weekend was a huge success. 🇨🇰

In conclusion I thank everyone who gave me feedback of their experiences, and end by quoting one of the participants who is external to the Kai Ming Association but was present for both days:

"This is the second Legacy weekend [I have] attended and [I] can highly recommend this to anyone who wishes to further their study of tai chi chuan." (MN, Leighton Buzzard)

In the beginning – tai chi

Dmitry Sokolik

Every-thing starts from ...No-thing...

What is this No-thing?

How could we discuss That, which is not a thing? The task is impossible, therefore worth the challenge of undertaking.

Our mind is capable of operating only on thoughts, a myriad of thoughts. Probably, it would be easier to understand if we say that our mind is capable of operating with and relating to things and objects. With a bit deeper observation, one can see that all things are just constructs of the mind. This is how the mind works. It needs labels, classifications, concepts, things, objects. Divide and conquer... This creates an ability of understanding, and allows some level of control over things.



Dmitry Sokolik

When one enquires into the mind and its workings, it is possible to see thoughts appearing and disappearing. What is between thoughts? What is before the rise of a thought and after its disappearance? ... Exactly ... there is nothing ... space ... gap This space is not touched by anything, but also is not separate from anything, permeating all things.

Wuji, in Chinese, means ultimate nothingness.

wu 無- 'nothing' and ji 極- 'ultimate'. We can schematically represent this emptiness by a dotted circle. Relating to our own experience, this is the state of deep sleep. Nothing is. Not even 'I am'.

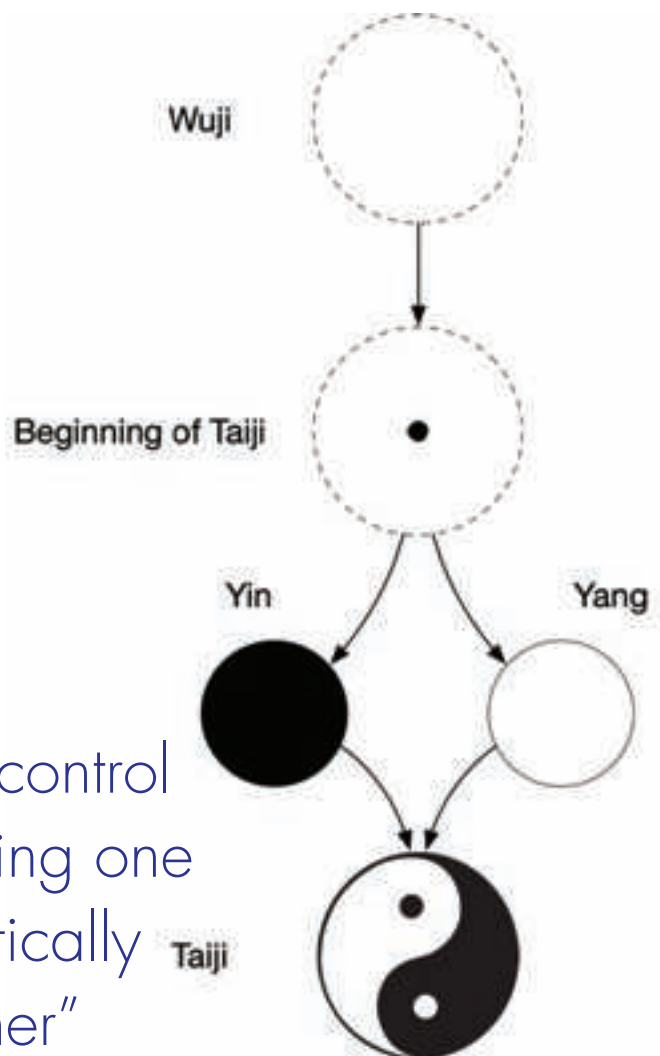
Then, something starts, still not a movement, just a sense of presence and intention. This creates a condition for the commencement of movement and creation. Let's schematically represent this by a dotted circle with a dot in its centre. In our own experience this is the beginning of the rise of the 'I am' sense, for example, when we transition from deep sleep to either dreaming or waking state. When 'I am' just starts to appear (the dot), the emptiness can be 'seen' even better. The dot emphasises and allows us to 'see' and appreciate the emptiness, and yin and yang are born.

With the rise of the 'I am' thought, when there is a clinging to that thought, the so-called identification appears to happen. This is the beginning of duality: 'I am' and 'what I am not', inside and outside.

Thinking begins and determines the interpretation of the experience. We are engaged in the thinking process. Duality is already apparent.

Yin and yang coexist in tai chi.

"Yin and yang control each other. Affecting one of them automatically affects the other"





Dmitry Sokolik teaching a class

The term 'tai' (太) represents the concept of 'supreme' or 'great', while 'ji' (極) signifies 'ultimate'. Together, they form 'tai chi', the great ultimate. Just as 'wuji' represents the emptiness from which all arises, 'tai chi' signifies the inherent unity within the limitless diversity of existence.

Yin and yang

After we successfully failed our task to describe the indescribable, which remains not even slightly more described, and logically arrived in the mind's comfort zone of operating with concepts, ideas and objects, we can finally give some credit to one of the greatest models of reality, the philosophy of tao.

Before we delve deeper into the concept of yin and yang, let's briefly explore the foundation of this philosophy – tao (道). Tao (also known as dao) often translated as 'the way' and can be understood as the fundamental principle that underlies and connects all things in the universe. It encompasses the natural order, the way things are, and the flow of existence itself. The concept of tao encourages us to embrace the inherent simplicity, harmony and wisdom in the natural course of events, while recognising that some aspects of reality may elude and may not need precise definition or description. As we navigate the intricacies of yin and yang, we do so within the framework of tao – a guiding philosophy that invites us to harmonise with the unfolding patterns of life.

In his book *Tao Tè Ching* Lao Tzu says: "The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name." In the same book he describes yin and yang: "When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad. Being and non-being create each other. Difficult and easy support each other. Long and short define each other. High and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other."

Yin and yang is a model of the duality of the manifested

existence. Man and woman, day and night, open and closed, expand and contract, fullness and emptiness, strength and weakness, heat and cold etc. Yin represents the passive, the feminine side of the polarity, and yang represents the active and the masculine side.

It is easy to see that yin and yang oppose each other, complement each other, support each other and create each other. Thinking about one of them would automatically presume the existence of the other.

Yin and yang have five characteristics. Each one represents a different aspect of the yin-yang phenomenon.

1. Yin and yang are connected to each other and inseparable. They exist in relation to each other, and one cannot exist without the other. This interdependence is reflected in various aspects of life:

- Time: day and night. The cycle of day and night showcases the dynamic relationship between yin (night) and yang (day), each influencing the other's existence and meaning.

- Temperature: hot and cold. The contrast between hot and cold demonstrates how yin and yang coexist and give meaning to each other. Heat (yang) is only understood in relation to cold (yin), and vice versa.

- Space: external and internal, up and down. The concepts of external and internal, up and down, illustrate the interplay of yin and yang in the spatial realm, helping us understand the different dimensions of existence.

- Health: the presence or absence of energy movement in the body exemplifies yin and yang's connection. When energy stagnates (yin), its movement (yang) is impaired. And when the energy movement (yang) lacks attention, listening and centring (yin) it becomes disorganised, not connected and energy wasting.

- Seasons: spring and summer represent yang's growth and expansion, while autumn and winter reflect yin's contraction and withdrawal, showing the cyclic nature of yin and yang.

- Energy: active and passive. The interrelation of active

(yang) and passive (yin) energies is essential for understanding vitality, rest and human relationships, all of which contribute to the balance of life.

- Form: protruding and sunken. The contrast between protruding (yang) and sunken (yin) forms highlights the interconnectedness and harmonious movement.

And so on...

2. Yin and yang are relative to each other. Their qualities are defined in relation to one another, rather than having absolute qualities. In the harsh weather of the North Pole (yin), the temperature of 2°C could be considered as yang. However in countries with mild weather 2°C would be considered cold (yin). Yin and yang qualities change based on context and their relation to the whole.

3. Yin and yang create and support each other. They define and reinforce each other. For example, our perception and understanding of light (yang) and dark (yin) is shaped by their contrast. They highlight each other's existence and significance. If one of them weakens, the second one is ultimately strengthened by the same amount. Can you convince yourself about this using the example of light and darkness?

4. Yin and yang control each other. Affecting one of them automatically affects the other. For example, weight distribution:

- Consider the balance between yin and yang in weight distribution between our legs. Imagine intending to increase the weight on the right leg from 60% to 70%. As the yang aspect of the right leg increases, the yin aspect of that leg automatically decreases by the same amount. This demonstrates how yang controls yin on the right leg.

- Simultaneously, as the weight on the left leg decreases from 40% to 30%, yang on the left leg decreases while yin on the left leg increases by the same measure. Here again, our initial intention to increase yang on the right leg evidently impacts the left leg.

- Similarly, if the intention is to decrease the weight on the left leg, enhancing its yin aspect, you will witness yin affecting yang on both legs. Can you apply the same logic to understand and experience it yourself?

5. yin and yang become each other. This can happen in a harmonious, natural way or not so harmonious, for example:

- Natural flow: the smooth, gradual transition from day to night and back again demonstrates the seamless transformation of yin into yang and vice versa.

- Unnatural shifts: stress or shock can trigger a sudden shift from one state to another, disrupting the harmonious interplay between yin and yang. For example, running uphill, reaching the peak and running downhill without changing running style can cause a fall, which is a sudden change from extreme yang to extreme yin.

If we adjust our speed to the new condition and slow down, this would result in a harmonious change from yang to yin.

The symbol of taijitu

Everything is relative and in constant change. The dynamics of yin and yang, their coexistence and inseparability is represented by the famous taijitu symbol.

This symbol visually encapsulates the essence of yin and yang, demonstrating their perpetual interplay and interconnectedness. The taijitu, often referred to as the yin-yang symbol, portrays two opposing forces, yin and yang, in a continuous dance, each containing an element of the other within itself.

Let's look at our own day-to-day flow of perception.



Some days we feel really good about ourselves, we experience a sense of omnipotence, anything seems to be accomplishable. People say nice things to us, reinforcing this self-euphoria of the ego. Most people would be really happy in this state. But a man who understands the play of yin and yang knows that this state represents yang reaching its peak. This is when yin starts to be born. So he prepares for an inevitable change and decline.

Then there are other, completely opposite periods. We might feel we have no strength, no desire and ability to accomplish anything, even simple things. A sense of worthlessness can easily appear in such a state. People seem unhappy about us, reinforcing this kind of retrospection and depression of the ego. Most people would be extremely unhappy in this state, which seems like a dead end. But a wise man who is aware of the yin and yang interplay knows that this state represents yin reaching its peak and a deep connection with our soul. This is when yang commences. So, he moves and revitalises with this rise of yang.

This way a wise man surfs the natural ups and downs while keeping his/her balance, instead of trying to maintain a yang extreme and exhaustively swim against the current of the river of life.

The circle in the taijitu symbolises wholeness in change, encompassing all of existence. The 'fishes' of contrasting colours within each half illustrate the inseparable nature of yin and yang. We can actually see that when one of the polarities reaches its maximum, the opposite appears and starts to grow. Furthermore, the dot of yin within yang and the dot of yang within yin illustrate their mutual interdependence and the constant potential for transformation between the two. In the biggest yang there is a seed of yin, and in the biggest yin there is a seed of yang. We always remember that.

In embracing the philosophy of yin and yang, we come to recognise the harmony within duality, the rhythm of change within constancy, and the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Just as the taijitu symbol flows and evolves, so does existence itself, in the forever dance of yin and yang...

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my teacher Fito Schreiber from www.tao-center.co.il for introducing me to Taoistic Arts in 2001, coaching, inspiring and supporting me all these years and also specifically in reviewing this article, suggesting corrections and improving its flow

The tai chi integration

Combining modern medical practices with tai chi techniques

Dr Rajeev Gupta

Tai chi, a traditional Chinese mind-body exercise, has garnered increased attention in recent years for its potential benefits to both physical and mental health. This article examines the advantages of integrating tai chi with modern medicine, providing an overview of the current evidence supporting its efficacy, potential applications in patient care, and challenges in incorporating tai chi into contemporary healthcare settings

Tai chi is a low-impact, mind-body exercise that has been practised for centuries in China and is rooted in traditional Chinese medicine [1]. With its gentle movements, deep breathing, and focus on mindfulness, tai chi has been found to offer numerous health benefits, ranging from improving balance and strength to reducing stress and anxiety [2]. This article explores the potential advantages and challenges of incorporating tai chi into modern medical practice, with the aim of enhancing patient care and outcomes.

Evidence supporting the benefits of tai chi

Physical health

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of tai chi on physical health. For example, research has shown that tai chi can improve balance, flexibility, and strength, reducing the risk of falls in older adults [3, 4]. Additionally, tai chi has been found to be effective in managing chronic pain conditions, such as osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia, as well as improving cardiovascular and respiratory health [5, 6, 7].

Mental health

Tai chi has also been linked to improvements in mental health, including reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression [8]. The meditative and mindfulness components of tai chi practice may contribute to these benefits by promoting relaxation, mental focus, and self-awareness [9].

Potential applications in patient care

Rehabilitation and recovery

Tai chi can be a valuable addition to rehabilitation and recovery programmes, particularly for patients who may not tolerate high-intensity exercises due to pain, disability, or other limitations [10]. As a low-impact, adaptable form of exercise, tai chi can be tailored to meet individual needs and capabilities, offering a safe and effective option for patients with diverse health conditions [11].

Chronic disease management

The integration of tai chi into chronic disease management programs can provide patients with a complementary approach to enhance their overall well-being and quality of life. For example, tai chi has been shown to improve glycemic control and reduce the risk of



Dr Rajeev Gupta

diabetic complications in patients with type 2 diabetes [12]. Similarly, incorporating tai chi into cardiac rehabilitation programmes can lead to improvements in functional capacity, quality of life, and psychological well-being [13].

Difficulties, Challenges and Considerations

Establishing evidence-based practice

While a growing body of research supports the benefits of tai chi, more high-quality, randomized controlled trials are needed to establish its efficacy and safety across various patient populations and clinical settings [14]. Establishing evidence-based practice guidelines will help ensure that patients receive appropriate, effective tai chi interventions.

Overleaf

Training and certification

Developing standardised training and certification programmes for tai chi instructors is critical to ensure the safe and effective delivery of tai chi interventions within healthcare settings [15]. This includes promoting collaboration between healthcare providers and certified tai chi instructors to optimise patient care.

By embracing the complementary nature of tai chi and modern medicine, healthcare providers can create a more holistic, patient-centred approach to improving health outcomes and overall well-being. The integration of tai chi into modern medical practice offers promising opportunities for enhancing patient care, particularly in the areas of rehabilitation, recovery, and chronic disease management. However, to successfully incorporate tai chi into contemporary healthcare, it is essential to address the challenges of establishing evidence-based practice guidelines and developing standardised training and certification programmes for tai chi instructors. Fostering collaboration between healthcare providers and certified tai chi instructors, as well as conducting further research to support the efficacy and safety of tai chi interventions, will contribute to the advancement of this integrative approach to healthcare.

Future directions and recommendations

Awareness and acceptance of tai chi in modern medicine

Increased awareness and acceptance of tai chi as a valuable complementary therapy within the medical community will be crucial in promoting its integration into modern healthcare settings. Encouraging healthcare providers to attend workshops, conferences, or training programmes on tai chi can help them better understand the potential benefits and applications of this traditional Chinese exercise [16].

Encouraging patient participation and adherence

For tai chi to be effective in enhancing patient care, it is essential to encourage patient participation and adherence. Healthcare providers should educate patients on the potential benefits of tai chi and provide guidance on selecting appropriate tai chi programmes and certified instructors [17]. Additionally, incorporating group-based tai chi sessions into existing healthcare programs can facilitate social support and motivation, further promoting adherence and long-term engagement in tai chi practice [18].

Insurance coverage for tai chi interventions

Expanding insurance coverage for tai chi interventions can help increase access to tai chi programmes and reduce financial barriers for patients. Collaborating with insurance companies and healthcare providers to develop appropriate reimbursement policies for tai chi interventions will be critical in making this complementary therapy more accessible to a wider patient population [19].

Conclusion

The integration of tai chi into modern medicine presents significant potential for enhancing patient care and



outcomes across various health domains, including rehabilitation, recovery, and chronic disease management. As the evidence base supporting the benefits of tai chi continues to grow, it is essential to address the challenges associated with its integration into contemporary healthcare. By fostering collaboration between healthcare providers and certified tai chi instructors, promoting patient participation and adherence, and expanding insurance coverage for tai chi interventions, the healthcare community can work towards a more holistic, patient-centred approach that embraces the complementary nature of tai chi and modern medicine.

Integrating tai chi into modern medicine thus has the potential to offer numerous benefits to patient care, including improved physical and mental health, enhanced rehabilitation and recovery, and more comprehensive chronic disease management. However, addressing the challenges of establishing evidence-based practice guidelines and developing standardised training and certification programs is essential for the successful incorporation of tai chi into contemporary healthcare. 🧘



Some people find it convenient to learn on-line



Tai chi can help with recovery from major, medical interventions

Dr Rajeev Gupta is a modern medicine practitioner, a consultant at National Health Service in the United Kingdom and director of the international organization of Integrated Health Practitioners. He is well known in the field of integrative medicine for his efforts to bridge the gap between modern western medical practices and traditional alternative therapies. He has a dedicated commitment to enhancing holistic health by incorporating practices such as tai chi into mainstream healthcare.

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Niall Keane Interview

by Robin Gamble

A man with a beard and a tattoo on his left shoulder is performing a Tai Chi movement. He is wearing a black tank top and blue jeans. He is holding a long, dark wooden staff with both hands, and his legs are in a wide, low stance. The background shows a traditional Chinese building with a tiled roof and some trees.

Niall Keane is an experienced fighter, winning 67 out of 83 of his international san shou fights, notching up in all several hundred bouts over a decade. He tells Robin Gamble about his development as a fighter, his move into teaching and the things that really, really annoy him about teachers and the decline of tai chi as a fighting art

Niall's coach, Paul Mitchell, was one of Dan Docherty's senior students and was a world champion in shuai jiao. In 2005 Mitchell beat the Chinese team captain and a Taiwanese competitor without conceding a single point over the three day event. Niall says that he was blessed to have had someone of that calibre to coach him.

"Then Dan Docherty asked me to start teaching, and I didn't want to because I was in the middle of my fight career but he said to me, 'Niall, when you start teaching, you learn again. It is important for you, and it is important for these people, to have someone like you to guide them'.

"Suddenly I was practising, not just for myself, but to be able to pass it on. So I started teaching, reluctantly. But I am focused on the martial side of things, so that's the type of teaching I did."

At the time the Professional Kung Fu Association, (PKA) in Europe, was putting on competitions on a circuit around a dozen European countries. They featured a form of sanda which is much like kickboxing but includes many more grappling techniques. It was styled: 'Sanda Extreme'. On a mixed card, one fight would be muay thai, the next sanda, and so on.

Niall started to enter his students and, he says, they started to do very well. He says: "They were winning Spanish opens, Swiss opens, and Austrian opens, and things like that. One of my students had something in the region of between 40 and 50 sanda fights. He lost the first few, he wanted to jump straight into it. But he was capable. He was kind of a slow burner. And then he became exceptional. And eventually he got to be a point off of second in Europe in professional sanda.

"He was a phenomenal fighter and he taught me the value of learning the full syllabus. For me, for example, the hip throw was never one of my go-to techniques. Maybe I've used it three times in my career, and he would use it three times in a round, and successfully. Teaching something that I wasn't particularly mad about myself, taught me that it's important to at least be able to know it and be able to teach it, even if it's not your go-to technique."



In 2005-2015 Niall found himself training a lot of students who were champion material. Carol Kidd was regarded as an exceptional fighter. He was a three-time British champion, and won a Spanish championship too.

Niall says: "Even when my classes weren't on, I made sure that the gym would be free and available to my guys. They were there all the time. The boxing ring meant they could go sparring on a daily basis."

Niall went to China with Dan Docherty, who by that time was showing the early signs of Parkinson's disease. Niall says: "He hadn't had it diagnosed at that time but he had a gait and we all kind of knew. It crept up on him and got pretty severe. The last few years, he used to do a thing called 'the gathering in Galway'. He would get together all the teachers from the style, from all over Europe. At that stage his form changed. Most of his life his form was what, in the tai chi world, you'd consider a middle frame.

"At the end of his life, when he was obviously pushing himself, he had really long, low, deep stances. I'd look at this guy who has Parkinson's, who was 20, 25, 30 years older than me, and still able to do stuff like that. It was impressive. He gave himself no excuses."

Given Niall's reputation as a fighter, I asked him how he felt about people who practise solely for health. He is, maybe surprisingly, all for it.

"I have absolutely nothing against people doing tai chi for health. I think it's great. Whatever anybody can do to get out there and stay healthy is really important. I have no issues about that at all. And for most of my tai chi brothers and sisters, that's their orientation.

"That time in Galway with Dan at the gathering we were all sitting around at the end and someone asked him 'Do you teach us the same way Chen Ting Hung taught you?' And he said: 'No, I don't. I don't teach you that way, because the training is too arduous and you wouldn't be able to keep it up. Chen Ting Hung's home was focused on producing full contact fighters.' He turned around to everyone in the room: 'Here are all the instructions and practical things you need,' he said. 'Ask Niall how many students he has.' The point he was making was that, because I focus on the martial training I only ever have a handful of students.

"As I said, I have no problem with people doing tai chi for health. The only issue I have is that every time I am interviewed, or if I give a comment on the 'fa-jing project' (a facebook group) people tend to assume that because my passion and my heart are into the combat-oriented part of



the arts, they think that I would disparage the other stuff. I don't."

On the other hand he has strong opinions on what we might call the 'faux' arts. He uses the term 'tai chi boxercise' to describe it. He says: "What I'm talking about is people who are 'pretending' to be martial, not people who practise solely for health. I mean, it's just like western boxing. I think that term is appropriate. In the west we are familiar with boxing and boxercise. A yummy-mummy goes down the gym for boxercise. What she's doing is not in any way comparable to what Cus D'Amato was teaching Mike Tyson. It's different. They're related broadly in that you might have gloves on and use a skipping rope.

"As long as people are honest about that, I have no problem. But the problem I do have is when people are pretending to be fighters out of some magical thinking.

"When teachers delude people who are trusting enough and innocent enough to look for a martial art, and they're being told it's a martial art but it's not what they are learning. They might endanger themselves thinking that they're capable in a real situation of doing things that they just can't do because they haven't done the practice. That's kind of dangerous."

For Niall this is a real issue. People being taught unrealistic combat training systems. "I've produced fighters so I'm kind of aware of what's required. I also know that the art is actually strong enough to deal with some of the best fighters in the world. It has that capability.

"So it's kind of depressing, it's disheartening when you see the art losing its reputation based upon people saying that what they're doing is combative or is martial, but it actually isn't. And whether they are being disingenuous or whether they actually believe this because they've inherited a belief and themselves trusted other people; it's all become the blind leading the blind.

"Now we have YouTube and we have social media, people can actually, before they walk into a gym, check it out. If they type in 'tai chi for fighting', what they are most likely to get is get a guy in pyjamas who's getting his ass handed to him by some MMA guy. They're just demonstrating how ineffectual it is.

"You're not going to see Sammy Berik's clips. You're not going to see my clips. You're not going to see my students' clips. Or if you do, they are pages into it so people don't get to see how effective the art can be. And in a way, I think I

said it recently on a forum, the only magic these guys have is in disappearing the true art."

Given that, what is Niall's approach to teaching tai chi?

"I teach the complete syllabus. I will do the neigong to start them off, and I'll watch them, and I'll see where there might be holes or gaps in their techniques and their understandings. I'll follow up with the tuishou method that relates to that problem. I'll train that. I'll train them in a few san shou (free hand fighting) methods, or there might be a wrestling technique, or it might be a striking technique, or something like that.

"And we'll get to the core of it. And I'll pull out sticks or, swords or whatever, and I'll show them a similar principle inside a weapon application. And then we'll do some wrestling, and then we'll spar and stuff like that. I try to adhere to the classics. We practise technique to acquire principle, and once we have principle, we can abandon technique. You internalise, you internalise the gong-fu.

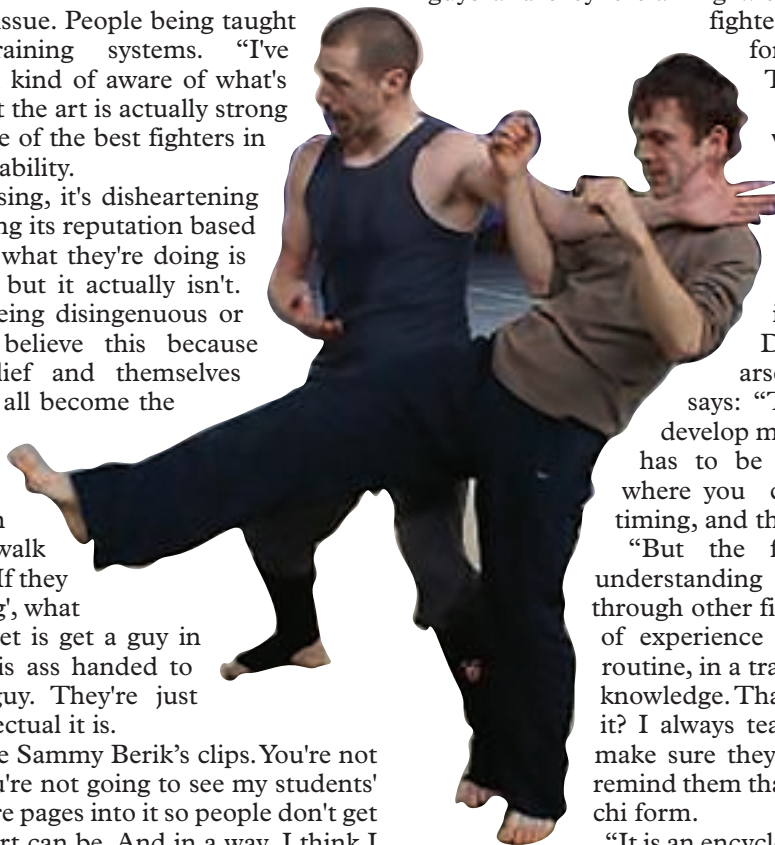
"That's probably why I teach small numbers. You can't teach like that if you've got 50 people in the room for, what's the average class. an hour? If you divide that up, how much attention are they getting? Whereas if I have five guys and they're training with me, and sometimes the fighters will be training with me

for four-hour sessions. They're getting quite a lot of hands-on and detailed work."

An area of tai chi that is often neglected, at least not worked on enough is the form. So I asked Niall how important he thinks it is. He says that Dan Docherty used to call it an arsenal of techniques. Niall says: "The form is not going to develop martial skill and power. That has to be developed in a situation where you can control the angle, the timing, and the range.

"But the form can give you an understanding that has been picked up through other fighters who've had decades of experience and have placed it in a routine, in a training drill, to pass on their knowledge. That's where I see the value of it? I always teach it to my students and make sure they get it right. But I always remind them that that is the value of the tai chi form.

"It is an encyclopedia of technique and an





encyclopedia of not just technique, but of strategy and tactics. And it is not actualised. You don't fight like that. But it has enough information in it for students to see how it could be useful to a fighter.

"This is crucial: You cannot control the fight unless you control the angle. Falling straight back, the way you see in so many tai chi demonstrations when a student is being pushed, allows that person extra time to get to you, gives them the momentum, and sets you up on the defensive. Your body has to absorb the shock of falling backwards, and you are momentarily nailed to the ground. And if that fighter can deliver a kick that can break your legs or your ribs, that's what's going to happen.

"So it is an absolute fallacy that is born of generations of inexperience without any kind of real combat. I understand that, and you can hear it in my tone of voice. It really annoys me when I see people being led down these garden paths because you become what you train. And if you train rubbish, rubbish is how you're going to be at fighting.

"I've seen it evolve from magic, and then once the magic didn't sell, it suddenly became sophistication and all alignments and structure and blah, blah, blah, blah. None of it corresponded to the classics. None of it corresponded to actual fighting. None of it would be helpful. All it did was train martial error. If you train it, you will become it.

"Some people are invested in that, so I can see it's the sunk cost fallacy. They don't want to give up. But here's an anecdote: I had a student, who spent 10 years training with a very famous tai chi sifu in England before he came to my classes. He was diligent. He's one of the few people and I've only had about three, to have 'bai shi' (become a disciple) under me because people's lives are busy. There's no point in adding a ton of syllabus to them if they're not able to do it. So Peter was becoming fairly effective. He was a good wrestler. He was in his late 40s, early 50s when he came to train with me so he wasn't looking to be an international combat sport athlete but he was doing well. And one day in the middle of the class, (I used to give public classes, tui shou and forms and such, and have the fighting classes afterwards – he was in the fighting class as

well in the public class) he exclaims in the middle of the hall – bear in mind, there are some, middle-aged women there trying to learn forms – and he suddenly says, loudly 'This is sh*t. Tai chi is sh*t.'

"What's going on?" I ask. "Are you having a breakdown there?" And he says: 'I've learned more from you in six months than I learned in 10 years with the other guy.'

"Well," I said, "I know. He was probably trying to adjust your little finger and orientate your chi or some such and not teach practical."

And then he went off on a crusade on all the forums, martial arts forums in Ireland, decrying all these people saying they were rubbish.

"My philosophy is : 'leave them alone'. They are happy in their own universe. They are not interfering with you. You just concentrate on your own martial art.

"He had an epiphany in the middle of the mats, realised that he had wasted 10 years of his life. And not voluntarily. He'd been cheated. He'd been lied to. And he'd believed it.

All the money and time and everything else that he wasted. And then suddenly he's becoming aware of that. It was a rough bit of enlightenment.

"But you should have the confidence to demand results when you're investing your time, that you're not wasting it. When there aren't any demonstrable results within three months don't expect, that in 10 years' time, you might become a Yang Lu Chan. I've had students who've trained with me for six months and have gone over and beaten three-time British champions because I can train people, and I know how to fight, and I know how to teach people to fight, and I can see the areas they need to work on. And I've coached for years.

"Results occur swiftly, but not mastery. After six months a student is not going to be doing the most subtle, amazing 'wow, that was a clever technique beautifully executed'.

"What they are going to be able to do at that stage is fight. Just as much as anybody doing six months of muay thai is going to be able to fight. There's no difference." 🥋



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Odds at the end

And the things people say...

Thoughts on breathing

The first and last thing we do is breathe. We are probably not aware of anything before we take the first breath and we never know when we will take the last. In the great Islamic poem the Rubiyat of Omar Kayam the poet says: "We do not know if we'll breathe out the breath we breathe in now." The Rubiyat is about life and its transience and the impatience of us all.

Breathing is a critical part of tai chi and qigong as well as meditation. It has always been rather taken for granted in the West. Certainly lay people take it for granted and seldom think about it but the medical and scientific establishments also seem barely to give it a thought either. Conversely in the East and in India breathing is a science, at times an art. 🇮🇳

If you want to find out more about the science of breath look up Michael Mosley's 'Just One' Thing on BBC Sounds.

You can find it with this link:

www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000wc07

Stop thinking and end your problems
What difference between yes and no?
What difference between success and failure?

Lao-Tzu
Tao te Ching

Tai chi moves... by Neil Bradley



"We think that we can fix the ringing in your ears"

Meditating on Kindness

by Bill & Angela Wong Douglas

One thing Angela and I have discovered from meeting tai chi and qigong masters all over the world is that they tend to be delightful, pleasant, playful human beings who often do not look their age.

Being compassionate has other incredible benefits beyond just raising your attractiveness, too! In 2019, a research team at the University of North Carolina discovered that having a compassionate nature can actually slow the ageing process.

Over 12 weeks, they measured something called telomeres, which are the genetic markers for ageing, in those who practised loving-kindness meditation and compared them to those who didn't. The latter had their telomeres shortened at a normal rate, but the former didn't see any shortening in their telomeres at all, meaning that the group ward off ageing just by meditating on love and gratitude." (from: *One Trait That's Said To Increase Attractiveness And Slow Ageing* (msn.com)) 🇮🇳

● Research reported in the International Journal of Neuroscience 16: 53-58, 1982, published on PubMed.gov: *The effects of the transcendental meditation and TM-Sidhi programme on the ageing process* by RK Wallace; M. Dillbeck; E. Jacobe; and B. Harrington; [1] showed long-term meditators' biological age indicators were 12 years younger than people's normal mean biological age indicators.

([1] Wallace, RK; Dillbeck, M.; Jacobe, E.; and Harrington, B.; *The effects of the transcendental meditation and TM-Sidhi programme on the ageing process* International Journal of Neuroscience, 16: 53-58, 1982, PubMed.gov)

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/6763007

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Diary Dates to watch...

● Quarterly Thursday afternoon 3-hour qigong training via zoom

● January 25th - Ba Duan Jin (eight strands of the brocade)

● April 18th - Yang family qigong

● June 6th - Tai Chi Ruler

● November 14th - TBA

Classes run 1pm to 4pm for £35

Contact Mark Peters 07831743737

● Robert Agar-Hutton is proposing a two day tai chi and qigong event in Milton Keynes. He is looking for volunteers so contact him on 0771 333 369 to register your interest

● Master Yang Jun will be hosting a seminar at the Yang Chen Fu Centre in Cambridge. Dates to be confirmed. Details will follow as soon as we have them. 🇮🇳

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