

A Living Document of Tai Chi Chuan

Exclusive Interview with 102-year old master; WU DO-NAN

By Jou, Tsung Hwa

Part II. The Secrets of WU DO-NAN'S Longevity

A Peaceful and Tranquil Life

In the western world, long life is enhanced by a control of emotions, lack of anxiety, and low stresses, so that excessive depressions and elations do not wear down the body. A story related by Wu Do-Nan shows that this control is not necessary for longevity.

Around 1980, the Beijing Physical Education Institute sponsored a Tai Chi Research Committee, chaired by Mr. Chang. Wu Do-Nan was a member of the committee, and observing that Chen Fa-Ku was also present, Master Wu questioned the purpose of the meeting. Mr. Chang explained that the purpose of the meeting was for Tai Chi research, study and evaluation. Wu Do-Nan expressed concern to the chairman that certain members did not play Tai Chi. Since members of the committee could vote and make decisions about the progress of the meeting, he wondered if these certain individuals were in fact members or just guests of the meeting.

Mr. Chang was certain that everyone he invited were famous Tai Chi players, and requested Master Wu to point out the members who were not Tai Chi players.

Wu Do-Nan selected Mr. Kao, who played Hsing I, and Chen Fa-Ku from the Chen village who played Pao Tui, the second routine of the Chen style. Wu Do-Nan asked Chen Fa-Ku directly if he thought Pao Tui was truly Tai Chi Chuan, and suggested that this be a topic for the committee's research.

Master Wu pursued this research, noting three necessary aspects of Tai Chi Chuan: (1) No strength must be used in the practice; (2) There must be only 8 gates: Ward Off, Roll Back, Press, Push, Elbow, Split, Shoulder Strike, Pull Down; (3) Movements must use the 5 steps: Advance, Retreat, Look Left, Gaze Right, and Central Equilibrium. He then asked Chen Fa-Ku to demonstrate his form to allow the committee to determine if the Pao Tui was indeed Tai Chi Chuan.

The situation grew embarrassing for the entire committee, and Mr. Kao, who played Hsing I, requested that he and Chen Fa-Ku become guests rather than members of the meeting. records of this meeting are found not only in Wu Do-Nan's personal writings but also in official documents.

In fact, my historical research of Tai Chi Chuan has shown that the softness of the Yang style of Yang Lew-Shan evolved directly from the Pao Tui of the Chen Family's Tai Chi Chuan. For most progress, Tai Chi players should be respectful and open-minded to all styles of Tai Chi Chuan and not be so sensitive to small differences between styles. But this sensitivity does not seem a trait necessary for longevity.

Control of Bad Habits

Our western understanding is that bad habits such as drinking, smoking, or use of drugs, do not help to achieve longevity. Wu Do-Nan, in contrast, says he enjoys alcohol, drinking only white wine, which is Chinese wine high in alcohol content much like our hard spirits. He also likes to smoke, but not cigarettes. He gathers his own tobacco leaves, processes them, and smokes them in his pipe. And his pipe is always in his mouth.

How can we explain Wu Do-Nan's long life, good health, constant blood pressure, and high achievement in Tai Chi, with bad habits such as smoking and drinking? The important lesson for each person is to know yourself, and know what practices or substances will have a negative effect on your health. The worst situation would be to continue a habit that you know is bad for you. Each person is different.

Concern for Diet and Nutrition

Every day the list of unhealthy foods grows longer and longer. Wu Do-Nan, as a young man, ate at least 6 eggs each morning, as only a part of his breakfast. Still today, at 102, he eats 2 eggs every day, plus all varieties of pork, beef, and chicken. He also eats seafood, but no vegetables.

Of what value then, are modern theories of diet and nutrition? Wu Do-Nan is in superior health, with straight spine and fine skin, yet he maintains what we would term an "unhealthy" diet.

Again, knowing yourself is the most important thing. Some people eat very little and grow fat and unhealthy. Others eat tremendous amounts of food and maintain perfect health. I read recently of singer Karen Carpenter, an example of the growing number of people who become obsessed with losing weight, become anorexic, so skinny and undernourished that they die. Self knowledge is better than any book or saying or program for correct behavior.

Regular Exercise

Doctors suggest that we need to keep exercising to stay healthy. Wu Do-Nan's example demonstrates the essential value of regular exercise to maintain health and to achieve longevity, and his superior health emphasizes that Tai Chi is the best exercise. What other exercise could have rescued Wu Do-Nan from his sickly childhood, and what other exercise can still be done at age 102? Tai Chi practice is Wu Do-Nan's first secret of longevity.

In his younger days, Master Wu practiced Tai Chi for up to 5 hours a day. Now, at 102, he practices Tai Chi for a half-hour each morning and each evening.

Again, you must know yourself -- how many hours of Tai Chi must you practice each day to achieve longevity? Only attending class each week without daily practice will never result in high achievement.

Moderate but Regular Sexual Activity

Accepted ideas about sexual activity are that neither too much nor too little sex contribute to longevity; that is, moderate activity. We cannot know for sure about Wu Do-Nan's sexual activity, since he is traditional Chinese and would consider such questions an insult. However, we can learn from observation.

Wu Do-Nan's wife is now 92 years old, and they were married when she was 15 and Wu was 25. Both look very healthy, especially his wife, who also is very clever and talented. She takes care of every part of Master Wu's daily life, such that he was not likely to have had much chance to have any girlfriends. Because of her control, Wu Do-Nan's sexual activity was likely to have conformed to accepted marital activity -- not too much or too little.

Their marriage did not produce any children, but since children produce happiness and worry equally, their value to longevity is not important.

Most important, Wu Do-Nan and his wife embody the concept of the Tao. One Yin and one Yang make the Tao. Tai Chi players who wish to follow the Tao should take an example from Wu Do-Nan and his wife. Other combinations -- such as 1 Yin with many Yang, 1 Yang with many Yin, 2 Yin or 2 Yang -- are against the Tao. Sexual-related disease can be seen as natural manifestations of this failure to follow the Tao. Seek only one wife or husband -- especially if you want to live at least 100 years!

Standard Daily Routines

I was very surprised by Wu Do-Nan's daily sleeping practice. He reports sleeping 14 hours per night. My thinking is that this is the real secret of his longevity. This is the second important aspect, the first being regular exercise through Tai Chi practice, contributing to his longevity.

According to traditional Chinese Medicine, There are two kinds of exercise:

(1) Tong Kung, literally translated as "moving exercise". Tong Kung has two aspects: first, to develop strength as in all the martial arts, and second, to develop internal breathing such as Chi Kung exercises like the Animal Frolics. Western style exercises like aerobics would be considered forms of Tong Kung.

(2) Ching Kung, or "still exercises", of which there are 3 categories: standing meditation without movement, sitting meditation and lying-down meditation.

Since I felt these 14 hours of sleep were the second secret of Master Wu's longevity, I wanted to ask about his sleeping and meditation practices. However, because of his traditional conservative martial arts training, he would have considered direct questions too personal, so I had to determine his secret indirectly.

First, I asked if he gets up in the night, since 14 hours is a long time to sleep, but he responded no. That response eliminates Tong Kung and standing meditation since he never gets up. To probe further, I asked his opinion of sitting meditation. He answered that this technique was for beginners. Clearly, he does not practice sitting meditation.

From his answers, I can reach only one conclusion: Wu Do-Nan practices lying-down meditation. I wanted to learn more about this technique, but I felt I had to stop my inquiry at this point. If I had questioned him further, he would have immediately understood my intention to discover his secret of longevity, and he would likely have refused further questions.

Instead, I was able to schedule another visit with Master Wu for the following day, so I could bring all the students who were with me on the Tai Chi Tour. The next day we arrived with gifts of his favorite things:

white wine, tobacco, rou-gan (dried pork), and eggs, and I asked a few more questions. I mentioned a book I had read from the 1930's, Tai Chi Chuan, by Chen Yen-Lin. I described the two chis, and the Heng-Haah breathing and asked Master Wu's opinion. It was for beginners, according to Wu Do-Nan.

Next I asked Master Wu his idea of the six sounds used in Taoist meditation. This technique, described in The Tao of Meditation, p.111, is a mantra meditation using the sounds "Who, Shoe, Foo, Way, Chemmy, She," "which not only trains the concentration, but strengthens the body through the correspondence of each sound with an internal organ." Master Wu thought this method a little advanced from the Heng-Haah breathing, but that this method one cannot reach enlightenment.

Members of the Tour began to ask him questions and take photographs, giving me an opportunity to talk privately with his wife, to find out more about Wu Do-Nan's sleeping practices. I asked if Master Wu snored or talked in his sleep, but she said she had never noticed and noise. Further, she said when he was "younger", or less than 100 years old, he slept without breathing, or with very slow and continuous breathing. After he became 100, his breathing was perceptible and occasionally he exhibited some shortness of breath.

Wu Do-Nan's secret then must be the practice of tortoise breathing. In The Tao Of Tai Chi Chuan, p. 126, tortoise breathing is described in which only the movement of the abdominal cavity is important, and the actual breathing is forgotten. The practice of tortoise breathing would result in his wife observing no noticeable breathing. Also, with this practice of tortoise breathing, Wu Do-Nan need not concern himself with the intake of smoke, alcohol, or specific foods, as these were burned up in the action of the Tan Tien.

Since Wu Do-Nan's wife is also so healthy and young-looking, we may look further into their meditation practices. A 102-year old man may normally expect to outlive 2 or 3 wives, but not Wu Do-Nan, so his wife must also have a secret. Perhaps the couple founds a highly skilled teacher of the Southern Taoist School meditation techniques, which use a sexual partner. Perhaps some nights those long hours of sleep were in fact practice together of this Southern meditation technique!

Reconstruction of Yang Lu Chan

by Mark C. Bassell

"Master Jou, Tsung Hwa has asked me to write an article describing the Tai Chi Farm, welcoming you to join us here and introducing myself. My name is Mark Bassell. Like many of you I lead a sedentary existence. I first came to the Farm at the beginning of 1985 my feet continuously hurt and were swollen. In addition to this I was constantly plagued by abdominal cramping and assorted pains due to a severe automobile accident in 1979. I have had some experience in hard style Karate, and had learned a Yang short form, but I hadn't really practiced since the mid 70's.

After about two and a half years with Master Jou I have made progress. While I still need to lose a lot of weight the cramping is almost totally gone, and my feet are much less swollen. My endurance and strenght are greatly increased. There are two exercises which I have benefited from most. One is the practice of a lot of Chi Kung, and the second is the practice of a lot of Fa Ching. Although I am 40 years old, never been particularly athletic, and still have a long way to go before I get into real good shape, I can confidently, and I want to stress that, confidently say that if I devote the time I will become good. Although I don't look that different yet, I feel much much better. This is a very real way to physical rejuvenation.

I wrote the following article as a sort of corollary to the article Master Jou wrote in the previous issue, I feel honored that he felt it good enough to want to print it. I must say that whatever is good about it I learned here at the Farm. Whatever anyone disagrees with: "Please remember that I wrote it and not Master Jou."

The current state of affairs in the practice of Tai Chi Chuan has been discussed in the previous article. The need for an ingathering of all Tai Chi stylists to assist one another in the creation of a more dynamic approach to Push Hands has been underscored. The aim, metaphorically expressed, was described as the recontruction of Yang Lu Chan. What does this mean?

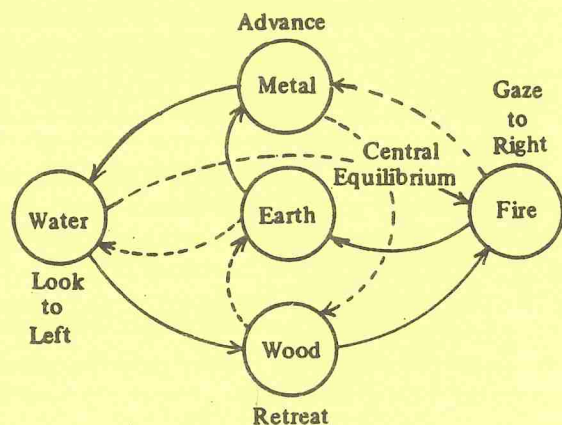
From the Fourth Century A.D. and onwards the Roman Empire continued to disintegrate. Greek philosophy, the intellectual cornerstone of ancient Europe, was preserved in the East by the various Muslim countries. Its re-introduction, through these countries, into Europe after the 13th Centruy is credited by many in resulting in the Renaissance in Italy in the 16th Century. This Renaissance continued to evolve into our present culture. For all its faults, our present culture is infinitely more advanced than its Roman predecessor.

The Boxer Rebellion in China in the early part of this century did two things: it smashed the backbone of traditional martial arts in China, and, what appeared to that time, scattered dying embers all over the world. What is the result of this? How will this affect martial art evolution in years to come?

There is a story told about Yang Lu Chan: When his eldest son Yang Pan-Hau (1838-1881) fought a challenge match against a great Boxer named Liu, he ripped his shirt while defeating his opponent. Yang Lu Chan said to his son: You did well, but your sleeve is torn. Is this Tai Chi?

Tai Chi Chuan aims at a type of performance and a level of skill superior to the other combat arts. In its own view it achieves this skill by uniting the 5 Elements in the legs with the 8 Trigrams in the hands. A discussion of techniques, internal as well as external, that could not be performed in a manner consistent with Tai Chi theory. Since we are not talking about application, what are we talking about?

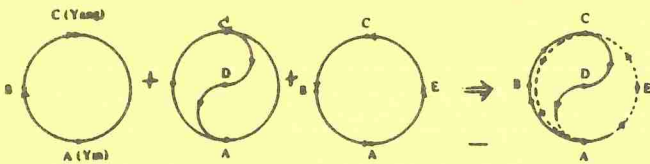
In Chinese Hsing I means many things. There is the sister form to Tai Chi; there is 5 Element alchemical theory, which describes the evolution and involution of matter, and there is Tai Chi footwork, consistent with this theory of material transformation. It is usually expressed looking like this:



In practice it is less-symmetric, with arching between each element.

The body turns to the right, sinks, shifts the weight to the rear leg, twines to the opposite side, and explodes forward. There is really no stepping at all, but instead, firstly, a discrete shifting of body weight, accompanied by twisting the abdominal muscles internally, which is initiated and mirrored by a snaking motion originating in the feet. Please note that this application is circular, linear, and twisting all at the same time.

In Chinese, Pa Kua can also mean many things. It is another renowned "sister" internal form related to Tai Chi. It is also a religious symbol. The I Ching is based on it. It describes Time, Fate, and Change. It describes change from Light to Dark, and from Dark back to Light. One interesting thing is that the Chinese regard the change from Light to Dark is regarded as different from the change of Dark to Light. While an experimental approach would use a meter and in either case, express the amount of measured light in Lumens, since physically light is a measurable phenomena, and that Dark is not a phenomena, but the absence of one. Therefore in either case, a precise thought, while not denying this type of approach, pragmatically approaches the cyclical nature of the change, and expresses it in a rotational form. The hands can mirror this rotational change. It is called 8 Trigrams. The practice of tracing Tai Chi diagrams is also known as Chan Su Ching. It looks like this:



It contains these forms: 1. Semi-Circle 2. Essing or spirals. 3. Full Circle.

So in relation to combining Hsing I with Pa Kua what we have is serpentine coiling in the legs releasing power on an arc, with serpentine rotation in the hands releasing power by opening, closing, and twisting, with both forms of power generation having the implied ability for direct transmission in a linear fashion, but along a helix. If you glued a bunch of little razor blades along the length of a piece of rapidly rotating rubber you will get an idea of the type of sophisticated power this will generate. Another equally correct way of visualizing Tai Chi movement, the combination of Hsing I and Pa Kua, is the integration of single rotation along a movable plane, (below the waist), with double rotation, in the hands, three dimensionally, above it, connected by a series of gears. What creates these gears?

The third element of Tai Chi: Chi Kung! Now we have the Master Key complete. Continued practice of Chi Kung brings these benefits: A.) a very hard resiliency; this has sometimes been described as "the needle within the cotton." B.) Improved health: Resistance to disease, enhanced healing, weight loss, improved digestion, etc. C.) The ability to deliver as well as sustain terrific blows. This represents the more "Yang" side of Tai Chi. Chi Kung is the liquid transmission between the legs and the arms.

To return to the opening paragraphs: When a culture, or a form of social transmission experiences a "Dark Age," or involution, or a loss of knowledge and technology; in the beginning stages the loss will not be consistent, usually, throughout the culture. For example, the industrialized countries suffering defeat after World War II lost their technological capacity, lost their intellectual leadership, and lost their established methods of distribution completely. However, since technology was able to be "re-imported" from America, these skills were rapidly regenerated. The result? Complete renovation within one generation!

The rebirth of Yang Lu Chan will take a similar form. The various elements, forms, applications, and theory which represent Tai Chi Chuan exist intact, they are just scattered. There is a statement in biology "Phylogeny recapitulates Ontogeny. This means that as a human embryo, for example, grows in the uterus, it passes through evolutionary history as it develops. First an amoeba, then a fish, then a mammal, and finally a Man. In order for Tai Chi to regain its previous "Grand Ultimate" status it will be necessary for it to recapitulate its own developmental history.

Where will this start? Tradition tells us that Tai Chi is a martial form of Nei Kung, which means internal Work. Taoism has traditionally been interested in alchemy and the prolongation of life through Nei King. Tradition also tells us that before Chang San Feng introduced Tai Chi Chuan he had studied Shaolin King Fu for 10 years. Perhaps the developmental history of Tai Chi Chuan reads like this: 1.) Prebirth: Hard style Kung Fu. Results: the body is strong and quick. Lots of techniques. 2.) Birth: Internal Work leads to the development of new ways of generating power, speed, flexibility, and endurance. 3.) Childhood: Chen style Tai Chi Chuan continues to internalize system, continues to use the best of Shaolin, and continues the practice of Chi Kung. 4.) Adolescence: Yang style Tai Chi; a more mature, more internal form of Tai Chi. Much

less external moves. Smaller postures and less movement. More dependence on distance and timing. Has traditionally included extremely hard training. 5.) Adulthood: Wu style Tai Chi Chuan. Small Form. Greatest use of internal power. Most formless, hardest to learn. 6.) Middle age: Development of variations. The Wu variation, the Sun variation, and others. Continues to recombine approaches of other internal and external martial arts. Very good fighting ability. 7.) Old Age: Development of short form. Discontinuance of Chi Kung. Tai Chi taught for aesthetic purposes. Discarding the "chuan". Desregarding the Master Key. Becoming a burning issues of the day for armchair intellectuals. Threatening to disappear not with a gasp but a whimper.

Tai Chi is not the only form of Chinese martial art being afflicted by this type of mentality. Let me quote from an article in The New York Times Magazine Section 2, March 29, 1987: Wu Shu: Meditation in motion. "The Taolu, (routines), of classical wushu share many of the esthetic requirements of dance Historians tend to believe people tried to fuse dance with practical needs to come up with supreior fighting methods Most warriors found this kind of fusion too difficult over the centuries wushu mingled with folk religion, medicine, and superstition.Some insisted that the martial arts gave them control over a mysterious life force, qi, which could then be used to hurt or heal people. This kind of Wushu is called folk wushu."

This was written by an American obviously quite taken by Communist rhetoric, which is certainly antagonistic to Taoism, which in any case is a mainstay of the Chinese culture. So what we have now, in addition to Tai Chi being reduced by the cycles of time to the point where "Chuan" is no longer meaningful, now this intellectual luminary would like to remove the "chi", leaving us only with Tai. Thus have the mechanists of the world fiddled with chopped sirlion and begotten McDonalds. Jazz and Classical music and sired Rock and Roll, and romance and ended up with pornography.

It is only with the co-operation of a great many Tai Chi players that all these various fragments can be re-united into a cohesive whole. It is only with co-operation that enough of a body of performance can be created so that stupidity such as that quoted above does not become truth. Just like the rebirth of Europe after World War II, by pooling our resources perhaps we

can have a Tai Chi Chuan that will live up to its name within the next generation. There are many repositories of the Chinese "technology" throughout the world, and also many cultural traditions, which due to Communist hostility, are no longer practiced in their homeland. Perhaps by pooling our efforts the possibility of a "Grand Ultimate Fist" will become an imminent reality, and the Tai Chi Renaissance which is being descussed will blossom into an even more advanced form.

Editors's Note

We will make a valiant attempt to publicize and promote all Tai Chi related events regardless of where they occur. Any events sponsored by recognized Government agencies will, of course, recieve special attention. However, since our schedule for publication of this Newsletter is bi-monthly, from time to time our announcements of important events will not give sufficient notice as regards international travel. We regret not being able to bring you notice of the following events earlier. All sponsoring agencies should give us three months lead time where possible.

The Beijing Institute of Physical Education, Cable 7555, Beijing 10084, Peoples Republic of China, will be sponsoring a training class from July 2, 1987 to July 22, 1987. There will be elementary and intermediate classes in Hsing I, Pa Kua Chang, Tong Be Chuan, and Tai Chi Chuan, Chen style. There will be tours, ceremonial dinners, certificates of award, and video tapes available. The cost in China will be \$35.00 per day, and applicants will arrange their own transportation. We will express mail out a photocopy of the correspondence received by Master Jou, Tsung Hwa upon the receipt of \$5.00. As we received this correspondence after April 25, too late for publication until our July issue, this listing is probably academic. This is regrettable. Everone who has made the pilgimage to China has been generally positive.

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by Jou, Tsung Hwa



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