



## AN INTERVIEW OF WU DO-NAN

### A 102-year-old Tai Chi Master

by Jou, Tsung Hwa

#### Part III- Tai Chi Chuan Related to the Martial Arts.

Wu Do-Nan exhibits the most important aspect of Tai Chi Chuan: longevity. This is the highest choice of the many benefits of Tai Chi Chuan. He has attained longevity in spite of his lifestyle, as described in earlier parts of this document.

There are also many great Tai Chi masters who have not attained longevity, but have attained a very high achievement in the martial aspects of Tai Chi Chuan. In spite of their martial achievement, which is well known among all martial artists, these masters have not lived long lives.

This contrast of longevity and martial arts achievement presents a dilemma in the study of the benefits and purposes of Tai Chi Chuan. With this dilemma in mind, and considering our present state of knowledge of what constitutes high martial achievement in Tai Chi Chuan, I questioned Master Wu about each of the commonly accepted aspects of high martial achievement in order to compare our present knowledge with the experience of Wu Do-Nan.

(1) We believe that in order to have high martial achievement in Tai Chi, a student must begin at an early age in order to gain the necessary flexibility. Wu Do-Nan, in spite of his childhood illnesses, learned this flexibility from the age of 9 years, and he accepted all the physical preparation that constitutes solid foundations of Tai Chi Chuan. His "basic training" was thorough and intense.

(2) A student must have a good teacher to gain high martial achievement in Tai Chi Chuan. Often the first question of a Tai Chi student of another is, "Who is your teacher?" or "How long have you studied with your teacher?". Although a Tai Chi teacher is helpful to the development of his students, students who rely too much on an individual teacher neglect their personal development and their own practice. Yet a commonly accepted question when evaluating a martial artist is who their teacher is.

Wu Do-Nan studied with Wu Chien-Chyan (or

Jianquan) for 8 years, then with Yang Chao-Hsiung (or Shaohou) for another 4 years. these are both teachers of high achievement. Wu Chien-Chyan taught his specialty of soft technique and Yang Chao-Hsiung taught him hard styles.

In Chinese tradition there are formal and informal students. The informal student merely attends classes, pays his fees, and goes home. The formal student is the one who, after the master sees that the student has serious intent, takes that student into his confidence. This begins with a formal ceremony in which the student swears his allegiance to his Master and the martial arts tradition and all the rules of the Master's school. This formality sets up the traditional Master-student relationship in which obedience is of prime importance.

Wu Do-Nan was a formal student of both his first two great teachers, and therefore all the secrets of their achievement were delivered to him in return for his obedience. Thus, Wu Do-Nan had the best of teachers and received many secrets during his initial 12 years of training.

**(3) We feel that the student must have a more than average level of intelligence in order to reach a state of high achievement.** Wu Do-Nan's professional career proves since he was a professor of archaeology and had written 5 books on Tai Chi Chuan, he certainly had above average intelligence. He also researched the different martial arts in China and, in researching his postures, he even took X-rays (a very expensive process in his day) in order to determine the exact internal positions that correspond with the external postures.

Wu Do-Nan, in his search for the whereabouts of Chang San-Feng, traced his movements during his life, as an archaeologist would. He therefore gathered numerous artifacts about the life of Chang San-Feng, which were unfortunately all destroyed in the Cultural Revolution.

**(4) Hard practice is essential for high martial arts achievement in Tai Chi.** Wu Do-Nan, as described in the first part of this article, practiced hard and regularly all his life, and continues to practice daily even at such an advanced age.

**(5) Persistence is necessary for achievement.** Wu Do-Nan started studying Tai Chi at the age of 9 years, and he told me that he never missed a day practicing Tai Chi Chuan. Only during the Cultural Revolution did he have difficulty in practicing yet he did so in secret even then.

In concluding, we see that the above 5 points are validated both by our knowledge and by Wu Do-Nan's life, and one would therefore assume that Master Wu would have reached a high level of martial arts achievement. Still, Wu Do-Nan's highest achievement lies in his attainment of longevity.

My present investigations into the martial abilities of Wu Do-Nan indicate that the opinions of present-day martial artists show only that his martial abilities are simply "good". So, I asked Master Wu to teach me push hands. I felt that he was very good, but not like the traditions of his teachers.

His first teacher, Wu Chien-Chyan, was tested when he moved to the South of China, much as any newcomer would be tested in a new location. He responded to the challenges by allowing any opponent to hold both his hands trapped inside the sleeves of his long traditional Chinese coat and then asking them to attack him anywhere. He was able to throw them away easily, even with his hands trapped, by using the "fa chin" energy as they drew back to punch him. Wu Do-Nan's second teacher, Yang Chao-Hsing, was described earlier as giving his students many painful lessons in "press" again and again.

So what is the reason that Wu Do-Nan, having met all the common requirements of high martial arts achievement and having even attained longevity, still has not reached the state of martial achievement of Wu Chien-Chyan or Yang Chao-Hsing? There must be some special training or attribute that must have been practiced by these other martial artists.

With very few great teachers to show us what may be missing, how can we determine the key to such achievement?

Personally, I can first conclude that the intention or motivation of the individual is the essential quality that makes one martial artist special while another is not. From his success at longevity, we can only conclude that Master Wu Do-Nan chose as his main intention to achieve longevity with less emphasis on martial arts. He had all the basics for high martial ability, but perhaps chose not to pursue that goal.

A similar choice in our daily lives is the choice between making lots of money and maintaining a spotless reputation. The best situation, of course, would be to both maintain a good reputation and earn money, and if both are your goal you can attain both. However, if money is the first priority, a person may do things that may tarnish his reputation because money is more important. Likewise, a person may live in poverty his whole life in order to never offend anyone.

Secondly, I thought of a story of Confucius learning to play music. His teacher taught him the first song on the zheng, a Chinese instrument much like the autoharp, in a matter of hours. When he came for the next lesson, the teacher suggested that Confucius was so clever that he should learn the next song. Confucius protested, saying that he did not feel he had mastered the technical aspects of the first song, its flow and accents.

Confucius continued to work on the first song, and when he played it for the teacher again, the teacher commended him and suggested he learn another song. Confucius again refused, saying that he had indeed played the song correctly and its flow was technically good, but that he had not yet been able to put his emotions and feelings into the song.

Again he practiced, and returned to the teacher to play again. His emotions and feelings were indeed present in his performance, but still Confucius was not satisfied. He must know the emotions and feelings of the creator of the song, since such a beautiful song required a certain spirit of intention. So he returned home to practice further.

After a year, Confucius told his teacher that now he knew the creator of the song. He was a tall

man whose eyes looked to the sky, who had a long stride and whose intention was to influence people to be good. This he learned from perfecting this one song, and Confucius indeed had found the Master key to music through this exercise.

Perhaps if Confucius had learned 100 songs he would have been a great performer of music. But from his work with one song in such detail and with such perseverance, he was able to communicate with the creator of the song, and thus know everything he had set out to learn about music. This intention is the secret of Confucius' high achievement in philosophy known the world over.

In Tai Chi Chuan, we must also have this intention to understand the creator, Chang San-Feng. Try to imagine how Chang San-Feng created Tai Chi -- his mood, his emotions, his purpose, his environment. He must have been in a place with a 360-degree view, so he could observe the sun and the moon and relate them to every movement of our body. Think of other aspects of the creator of Tai Chi as he originated the movements we follow today.

When Wu Do-Nan's teacher taught him the "press" over and over, we see a similarity with the method of Confucius. You must consider your teacher in the same light--analyze him and his intentions. Why can he do things you cannot do? Your ambition must be to surpass your teacher, to throw him away. With this ambition, you can seek to communicate beyond your teacher with the creator of Tai Chi, and in this way- find enlightenment.

If one is only afraid of the pain of the press, then there is little development, but if one's unbending intent is to know deeply how to develop this energy, then this ambition leads one to high achievement.

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# The More The Better?

By Jorene Proper

*Editor's Note: The story about Confucius' study to play a musical instrument appears in the preceding article about Wu Do-Nan. It is repeated here with another point of view, because this story is so important for Tai Chi players. Very often we learn a form, then move on to different styles or weapons forms, or push hands. We acquire too many things with no time to practice them all, rather than concentrate on one to reach enlightenment.*

Let me retell one of Mr. Jous' favorite stories about Confucius, the great sage and teacher of Ancient China. Once Confucius studied to play a musical instrument. His teacher was impressed at how quickly he made progress from the start. In fact, Confucius learned to play his first song in one lesson! The teacher urged him to return the next day in hope of teaching this prize pupil another song. Confucius refused the invitation, explaining that he had learned his first song but he was not yet skillful in performance.

After a week, Confucius returned to his teacher and demonstrated that he could skillfully perform the song. Again his teacher urged him to learn a new song. Again Confucius refused for he recognized that he lacked the technique of putting emotion into the music and he wanted to be able to play the song with expression.

After a month, Confucius returned to his teacher. He had captured the feelings of the song and conveyed them with expression through the tone of the music. The teacher praised Confucius for his skill and his persistence in learning, and again urged his pupil to begin a new song. Confucius refused a third time, explaining that he was yet unable to communicate with the creator of the music, (At this time in Ancient China, songs were passed on without dating or credit to the composer. Confucius aspired to know the creator's mind, intent and spirit.) The teacher admitted that he, too, was lacking in this ability, and they both sought out to attain this higher level of development.

A year passed and Confucius returned to

report on his progress. He had been able to communicate with the creator of the song, and he described him as a tall man with a large stride. Most important, Confucius learned that the composer was a happy and virtuous man who hoped his music would spread happiness and virtue through a song. The teacher also reported an achievement for he had even learned the identity of the composer to be the great King Wen.

What is to be learned from this story? If Confucius had learned many songs, his high achievement would only be to develop a repertoire of songs. Instead, Confucius sought to learn one song to mastery. Confucius sets an example for all students, and for us as students of Tai Chi Chuan. What is your choice? Do you practice many forms to have a collection of Tai Chi styles or do you learn one form to mastery? The "typical American personality" leads us to seek novelty and variety in diversity, yet exploring all possibilities doesn't help to know any of them well.

The Chinese say: "一而百知" which roughly translates, "Know one thing, know one hundred things." (This "know" also translates as "passing through" as on a journey of enlightenment.) When you take a journey, you can try each path along the way, but you won't travel very far. In contrast, if you keep to the main path and avoid getting sidetracked, you will make greater progress, to pass through to the other side. At this point, the knowledge acquired on the journey expands to other areas. For example, the study of Tai Chi Chuan could expand to fighting techniques, to health and rejuvenation, to movement in daily activities, to a career, and to many practical applications in everyday living.

Another lesson is to be learned from the story of Confucius. Communication with the creator provides insight and awareness to the mind intent and a totally different realm of knowledge. Imagine having the persistence and the patience to pursue knowledge to this level of attainment!

Using an example of Tai Chi Chuan again, communication with the creator enlightens one to awareness about how Tai Chi Chuan is designed to reflect the movements of the sun and the moon in the heavens. "Wave hands like clouds" or "cloud hands" demonstrates this concept as the hands go through a pattern of movement where energies are matched like the movements of the sun and the moon over the clouds.

This story of Confucius doesn't reveal any easy answers or instant solutions. Instead, this story presents a real challenge. One technique is recommended for the journey: meditation. Meditation develops the focus necessary to follow a path. Also, one of the most difficult lessons learned through meditation is to give up attachments. The purpose of this lesson is not only to detach from material things. Ideas, desires, and expectations attach us to a frame of mind that is closed to enlightened awareness. Letting go of these attachments opens the mind to accept a new realm of being, in communication with the creator. On your Tai Chi Chuan journey, if you try very hard to learn many forms and expect to gain high achievement, it will never come. Detach from expectations through meditation, focus on the path of your journey and you will pass on to a breakthrough to enlightenment.

## Push Hands Competition

by J. Justin Meehan

Upon viewing a commercially available videotape purporting to document the Push Hands Competition held in Taiwan, I have to confess that I am both shocked and depressed. What I saw was more closely akin to a Pushing and Shoving Match (I do not want to offend Sumo stylists by relating my first impression) than anything even slightly touching upon what I consider to be Tai Chi Chuan. I am not stating that the videotape should not be viewed. Much the opposite. I suggest it be viewed by as many serious practitioners as possible (although I cannot bring myself to show it to anyone who has not studied for a respectable period of time).

Skip the inane gratuitous commentary on the videotape, but be sure to observe the rules and regulations clearly presented for Tai Chi Push Hands Competition; then see the footage of actual competition. If you study TCC as a martial artist, don't embarrass yourself by viewing this footage in the presence of martial artists from other styles.

Regardless of your approach to the art, you are going to find the reality depicted in this film both offensive and disillusioning.

The matches and rules concern who can shove their opponent out of a circular ring or lift their opponent's feet off the ground or throw their opponent down without using sweeps or throws. Feet placement is not fixed and there is no penalty for disengagement of touch or control. The result is something very much like what happens when the front lines of football teams bash into each other at the snap of the ball (no offense to football). As the Push Hands "competitors" strain into each other it becomes obvious that only the stronger one will win. Double Weighting and inclining forward over their base stance, the contestants huff and they puff and through sheer grunting brutishness they force their opponent out of the ring.

There is absolutely nothing even slightly resembling the ideals of TCC set out in the classics. There is no "ward off", "roll back", "press" or "split". There is no "4 ounces". If anything, the contestants should put on heavy padded gloves so that they will not be distracted by the sense of touch. Through it all there is a winner and a loser the biggest loser is the Art of TCC.

Perhaps, the "applied" Art or TCC is only for that small handful of recognized masters that come along only rarely in an entire century (e.g., Yang Lu Ch'an, Chen Fa Ke, Yang Cheng-Fu, Wu Yu-Hsing, etc.). I choose not to believe this. As Yang Chen-Fu points out in his "Discussion of the practice of TCC". "If one practices faithfully . . . success is assured." (T.C. Touchstones, Page 3, by Douglas Wile). On the other hand, perhaps it is the fault of the videotape or tournament, in that the best competitors were not depicted. I was not there myself. However, I do intend to familiarize myself with the rules or attend the next workshop offered this summer at the Tai Chi Farm on the Rules of Push Hand Competition (workshops sponsored all summer under the auspices of Jou Tsung Hwa).

To some extent, I believe that the rules themselves are much to blame. Rules should be designed to promote the art. High kicks and not hand techniques receive points in Tae Kwon Do, as contrasted to Shotokan Karate, which is almost

the opposite. American kickboxers are penalized if they do not throw so many kicks per round. Amateur boxing scores a knockdown punch as entitled to no more points than a completed jab. These rules are to promote safe competition and artistic excellence within the art itself.

The rules presented for Push Hands Competition do not credit or take into consideration rewarding the demonstration of soft over hard and hard over soft. The net result of what is depicted in this videotape of the Taiwan championship is so offensive that I must urge my contemporaries to familiarize themselves with the rules as soon as possible and to make recommendations that will improve the art's chance to raise the level of its participants, rather than lower that level. As a spectator sport the footage of the Push Hands Competition is vastly inferior to Judo, Sumo, and Wrestling. As an attempt to upgrade TCC or to recognize its Masters, it appears useless and counterproductive.

*J. Justin Meehan, Esq., a well known author and teacher of Shaolin and Tai Chi Ch'uan in St. Louis, Missouri, will be travelling throughout the U.S. this summer presenting Tai Chi workshops. Mr. Meehan wishes well to Master Jou and all attendants of the Tai Chi Farm workshops (several of which he will be attending himself, especially Master Jou's).*

## **A Report of the 1987 Chang San Feng Festival** by Mark C. Bassell

This coverage is going to be a little disjointed and may be of an ongoing nature. I'm going to mix my own personal impressions of what went on behind the scenes, by people helping to prepare for the people coming to participate, with the participation itself. For example, due to the fact that I was working elsewhere than the Farm Friday night, I missed the Taoist Wedding Ceremony, I have been assured by many people that the bride was ravishing. I am pleased that although I did not have the privilege of experiencing this myself, it is in fact a real solid truth and has been accepted and endorsed by everyone present.

I've been in on the last two festivals and played a purely minor role on the organization and work that went into them, but this time I had the stupidity, not to mention audacity, to "criticize" Marsh Rosa about some of the details involving food preparation, and promptly found myself in charge of it.

Peter Kraus was splitting responsibility for the Dinner with Marsha, and chicken was prepared for Barbecue, along with lots of salads ordered from a delicatessen. I, on the other hand, in a vain and foolish attempt to live up to my reputation, decided to do the lunch from scratch, and chose a Middle Eastern theme with a choice of vegetarian overtones, or pure carnivorous gluttony. Frank Mazzuca had been working all week on the Pavilion, 12 hours a day when he came into this scene, and was exhausted. As a matter of fact, he came real close to passing out in my living room. Prior to that Friday, starting maybe the Sunday before, he and a crew too numerous to mention constructed the now legendary Wu Chi Pavilion, for outdoor practice in inclement weather, especially on time for the Festival. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, it was not to undergo its virgin flight that weekend, and will achieve its baptism under fire real soon. There is one large arrogant stump in the middle of it rooted better than any of us that has not responded to some real hard mechanical technique. Classics or not, I'm going to cut that sucker where the sun don't shine.

Saturday, in relation to my own participation, consisted mostly of stolen moments of push-hands with people I know, and a lot of last minute improvisation to serve everything. I reached personally two conclusions: If I should ever be so stiff and inflexible as to allow my center of gravity to be pushed into an inferior position like this again that A.) The food will be included in the price and B.) There will be a kitchen at the Farm. Bargaining with weekend warriors over the price of bananas made me realize that as far as "emotional" push hands goes, I got a hell of a long road. Also, as Gerry Cooney may have realized, having devastating power without an efficient delivery system, will not make Jerry Lewis look like Chang San Feng.

Somehow, I also got suckered into preparation of the Dinner also and I learned that there is no justice in Warwick, no joy in Mudville.

Because of some esoteric principle not yet evident to me everything went a lot smoother on Sunday, and I even managed to escape from my very narrow role as a scullery slave and enjoyed myself.

As I said before, these are my impressions. In talking with Anson, who did all the registration, collected the cash, and got even more frantic than I did, I gather that his week-end also did not approach what might be considered to be an ecstatic experience.

Marsha Rosa was probably the person who most approached being a "brain", or at least a fragment of a central nervous system. She juggled the figures for all the meals, arranged to have the shirts made, and did too many thing too mention, generally oversaw everything, (she was the person I yelled at). Somehow, without a dictatorial Taskmaster, the whole thing pulled together. It exists in my memory as a montage of almost superhuman efforts by a lot of different people in a constantly changing kaleidoscope, which metaphorically, at any rate, approached absolute formlessness.

Existing in the form of a subconscious backdrop of fear, loathing, and added responsibility, all the people at the Farm had been requested by Master Jou to do a demonstration. There is an old Chinese saying: As regards martial arts, judge the teacher by the student. Behind Mr. Jou's convivial and cheerful demeanor I think there may have existed what has been called "the needle within the cotton". Master Jou also wanted us to have matching uniforms. The pain, heat, dehydration, gasoling fumes, and sheer aggravation that picking these up, the Sunday before, after being stuck for 3 1/2 hours on the Tappan Zee Bridge, on the way to Chinatown cannot be printed. However, I was smart enough not to get the pair of pants that had gotten polluted with pickled tofu and chile; Anson got stuck with that.

Anyway, we had intended to practice for this demo both Saturday and Sunday morning because we truly wanted it too look good. Guess what? Everyone at the Farm who is a regular was involved doing something, and when we got to the demo nobody had rehearsed for a week. Since it actually came out OK I think the spirit of Chang San Feng had mercy and gave us a little help.

This of course represents an aspect of the Festival that many of you whom were there don't remember. We want to get into a little bit of "investigative reporting" before we let this thing go, but more importantly I want to say that this was the most successful festival up till now in terms of attendance. Who knows? Next year we may even advertize it! The property has pretty much been cleaned up and a great deal of renovation has been accomplished. We hope that all of you had a very fruitful time and we want you to return next year. Please don't take my tongue in cheek reporting seriously. Master Jou, and the rest of the staff will continue to labor mightily to create an environment where all the various stylists of Tai Chi will feel comfortable to come and share with each other. If all of you don't come, instead of the reconstruction of Yang Lu Chan we might end up with the Golem of Prague. That would be a catastrophe! Again, the purpose of the Tai Chi Farm is to provide a place where all Tai Chi Players can meet and convert Wu Chi into Tai Chi in a relaxed atmosphere of conaraderie. Ultimately, the success of the 1987 Festival should be measured in terms of that alone. Looking forward to seeing you next year, and also during the exciting and unusual seminars taught by various Masters from around the World this summer. Roll back and become somebody!

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