



## THE PUBLIC CHALLENGE

FROM THE MASTER FILE: Story #1

by

Mark Bassell

Yang Chen Fu and Wu Chien Chyan were the two best known Tai Chi Masters during the Nineteenth Century. Their fame was widespread. Both of these illustrious Masters learned their Tai Chi in Beijing in Northern China. Afterwards they had a similar history: First they went to Central China, and then re-located to Southern China. At that time no one in Southern China knew anything about Tai Chi Chuan. Due to the tireless promotion and ceaseless teaching efforts of these two masters, many students of Tai Chi Chuan began to proliferate as the Art became more and more popular. These students of Tai Chi began to assume the position with their students that their Masters had hitherto occupied with them as they tried as hard as they could to carry on in their footsteps.

At first these students taught only Form. And there are a great many Tai Chi "Teachers," even today, who teach little else. Gradually, however, the majority of these Teachers began to also teach "Push Hands." And this push-hands application that these successive students developed began to take on the characteristics of their "Teacher!" Some people, for example, like to emphasize attack before defense; other people may like a low stretched-out posture as opposed to a very erect one. And so the movements of

these students were based on the movements of their Teachers. So far, so good. But when the students began to teach this tendency was magnified even further. And these successive "students" began to canonize the approaches of their respective "Teachers," and began to "argue" with each other about which Masters technique was "better." So a very formal approach to learning push-hands, which in many cases was based on purely individual idiosyncracies, began to also become widespread. At that point the postures in the "Wu" Form began to be regarded as being different from the postures of the "Yang" Form, even though these postures have the same name, and the same application. Their manner of "phrasing" does have some slight difference, since two different people were doing them, because NO two people in any Tai Chi school have ever done a move in exactly the same way.

A simple analogy to this would be as if two students of Tai Chi today, in America, who decide to open a School, and one calls his "The John School of Tai Chi Chuan," and the other calls his "The Curtis School of Tai Chi Chuan." Are these different styles? Have they introduced new physical principles of movement? Have they superceded the Eight Trigrams in the hands, and the Five Elements in the feet?

Have they invented a revolutionary new type of Chi Kung? (Do they even know the basics?) Obviously, there is a great deal more to inventing a style than merely saying one has done so, and the very many "combined" forms, and forms which are named one thing or another, but all look like Yang Form, are a fitting testimony to this skepticism.

Many times there is a lot of pointless idle chatter about which Master is "better." Students of all styles seem to be bemused by imaginary "confrontations" between Masters. But these two Masters, in particular, had a very open mind and respected one another. Wu Chien Chyan had learned from his father, who had learned from Yang Lu Chan and Yang Pan Hou. Their Tai Chi was based on the same principles of movement. The separation of Schools was created by their successive students, some of whom really split apart, glorified their own Teacher, and spoke disparagingly of the other Schools, and the other "styles," and went so far as to spread negative rumors and innuendo about the Master themselves. There was a lot of talk about which Master was really "superior."

During all of this a charity organization wanted to stage a tournament to raise money and invited many famous Masters to perform. The headline event in the order of performance was to be the simultaneous performance of Yang Chen Fu and Wu Chien Chyan. There were two schools of thought as to what this performance should be. A.) a "Survey Course," of Tai Chi techniques performed with the perfection that only these two Masters had achieved. This view was espoused by the older and more advanced students; and B.) an actual fight to determine a winner. This view was held by the younger and newer students.

As the date of the performance approached all of the tickets were sold and the density of the crowd inside the Theater, being used as an Arena was reaching critical mass. Public rumor stated that one of these masters would not leave the Theater alive.

Master Yang arrived first. Master Wu came shortly thereafter. Both men were invited into the lobby for a brief rest. When they spotted each other, they exchanged very affectionate greetings, and had a long, friendly, relaxed chat. The Promoters of the Tournament were taken aback, as the rumor mill was in full force, and they, like everyone else, were expecting to see a mortal confrontation. (In all fairness, at this time, such matches were perfectly legal, and they were by no means rare.) It is also possible that they were frightened that such affectionate greetings might foul up their betting odds.

After an interminable wait the Master of Ceremonies announced the commencement of the demonstration. The outer dress of both Masters consisted of the traditional long Chinese toga-like robes. After the ritual invocation these were removed and underneath both were dressed in uni-

forms similar to modern day Kung Fu work-out dress, (actually the traditional "parents" of such dress.) They began their demonstration very simply: The first routine consisted of fixed-step push hands. After this they performed the moving step push-hands, and then the Da Lu. They did this very seriously with deliberate intention. Gradually, this routine transformed itself into free-style sparring. But rather than a fight this sparring resembled a conversation they were having with each other; similar to a call and response in music. Their conversation reflected a Yin to a Yang: The ability to wholly manifest the opposite polarity to a technique. Pure defense rising to meet pure offense. So there was an energy exchange which not only reflected the techniques but the personalities, the psychologies, and the spirits. As this exchange continued it began to appear that the unfolding techniques were a dialogue in the unfolding of a new language, a new medium for the expression of movement in a form where it could be used not only for the defense of one's body, but of one's essence.

There is a Chinese expression, as regards the Yin and Yang of combat, that one should be like a dragon and the other like a tiger. Knowledge should contest with tenacity. (Point-counter-point) Ideally, a contest between two Masters, unbound by the laws of the planet Earth, because of their skill, should be such that one can instantly harmonize with another the way a sensitive musician, playing Jazz, can pick up the end of a line, on the note where it ended, and continue the continuity of the development of the expression without faltering. Such a person's faith is very strong, and he can produce his changes fluidly, and with no hesitation.

As the contest continued both Masters became quite engaged and did not want to stop. They were enjoying themselves, and the level of skill and the purity of their attacks and defense were increasing. The lightness and agility with which they responded to one another had the crowd gasping in amazement. There was a constant expansion and contraction to the techniques as it changed from long extended force to short impact transmission, rising and sinking in wavelike motions. Their performance was certainly not designed to injure each other for the amusement of the public, and certainly not for politely flattering each other either. But they were working for their own mutual self-growth and the enjoyment of being able to perform the highest and most advanced techniques: - - - an opportunity they could not have with an inferior competitor. When two people have the same techniques, if they play "Ching Ling," or a conservative defensive play, one or perhaps both will never have the chance to really shine. If you are sinking, or Jen, and working on a long-range technique, or Chang Jing, you can win or lose; it's the same thing, because you are playing at the top of your form. The audience was hypnotized by their performance: Time seemed to stop and there was complete silence. They then

received a standing ovation. Ceremoniously, they slowly turned and bowed to each other, and then to the audience. This performance did much to dispel a lot of negative useless rumors. It is a story which should be much more widely understood. If the unification of the 5 Elements in the legs and the 8 Trigrams in the hands, really create a state of Tai Chi, perhaps this evolutionary advance, will affect one's ability to become superior in the sense of warding environmental negativity from one's form. It will also create a condition where a superior evolution, in the sense of one's level of being, so that kind-heartedness and virtue, which should be present in a Man by Nature, will flow from one's essence. Such a person can reach a pinnacle of achievement, but without encouraging vanity, and without encouraging anxiety. Such a person might be able to build upon the accumulation of his experience, and those questions and answers which become evident to him, through his own personal experience, can be transmitted to others with benevolence. Such natural harmony will not meet with opposition.

## Editor's Note

Dear Tai Chi Player,

As we approach the end of 1988, it is time to reflect on the events of this year. To begin, it is perhaps the biggest news that the Tai Chi Farm is still here! Initial plans to sell the property in exchange for a new location were cancelled with the falling market. In the future, the Farm is expected to remain in operation for two or three years at least. There is no hurry to sell the property and this place has much to offer and much potential. We have the advantage of waiting in a secure situation until a good opportunity for change occurs.

The annual Chang San Feng Festival was held June 3rd, 4th, and 5th. The festival was attended by students and teachers from China and the United States. The guest of honor was T.K. Shih from Kingston, N.Y. He demonstrated Wu Tang Tai Chi, and his daughter, Wenchen Shih, also demonstrated her form. She is the National Wu Style Champion of China. Sun style Tai Chi was demonstrated by Mr. Zhang Lu Ping of Zhejiang province in China. Ken Cohen (the Taoist priest of Denver, Colorado) and Dr. Yang Jwing Ming (the author and Master of Massachusetts) led the ceremony on Sunday to honor Chang San Feng. Steve Rhodes and Pat Rice (known from "A Taste of China" from Virginia) explained the rules and judging of push hands competition. Everyone had a chance to try the famous Lion Dance. It was fun, but not as easy as it looks! Throughout the weekend participants could choose from a variety of workshops including Chi Kung, push hands, various forms, and the fundamentals of Tai Chi. A videotape of Cheng Man Ching showed his Yang form, sword forms, and push hands. Wu Chien Chyan's Wu Style Tai Chi and Pa Kua were viewed on a videotape by Kumar Frantzis. Also, Mr.

Jou played a videotape of the Chen style made by him on a recent trip to China. In all, the festival was a success, and the kind of experience that makes Tai Chi players return annually to this reunion.

A special thanks to all of the local students and friends of the Tai Chi Farm who generously contribute time and energy to enhance the quality of this festival and to share in the experience and knowledge of Tai Chi.

Fewer workshops were held at the farm this summer, due to the expected sale of the property. Mr. Jou held his workshops on the forms and "Master Key of Tai Chi." Also, T.T. Liang visited for a week-long workshop. J.J. Soong was unable to come this year, although he wrote that he would attend next year's festival and he will have a week-long push hands workshop to follow. The participants in this year's workshops were enthusiastic and appreciative to these Masters for sharing their knowledge. The students included visitors from England, Germany, and Canada. A special thanks to all who helped to make these workshops a success.

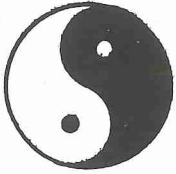
By the time this newsletter is printed and distributed, Mr. Jou will be in China, leading a group to visit the Wu Tang Mountains, the site of the origin of Tai Chi. A report on the pilgrimage will follow in future issues of this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Jorene Proper

P.S. The Tai Chi Farm is searching for caretakers who would live at the farm, rent-free, in exchange for security and light maintenance here. Please contact the farm if you are interested.





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