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The History & Origin of T'ai Chi Ch'uan

THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF T'AI CHI CH'UAN - PART 2

This is the Third in a series of Articles originally written by Master Jou, translated by T.T. Liang into Chinese, retranslated into English, edited by Paul Galagher, and re-edited by Mark C. Bassell.

I have already mentioned in my series of articles, "The Master Key to T'ai Chi Ch'uan," that if there had not been a breakthrough it would have been impossible to have the present day Chen style First and Second Routine. In the T'ai Chi Ch'uan Introduction written by Hsu Yu Sheng in 1939 he said: "There were originally 3 kinds of Boxing handed down within the Chen Family; namely Chang Ch'uan (Long Boxing), Pao Chui, (Cannon Fist), and Wu Tao Lu. Most of this is lost. What we can practice at present are only the First Set, which has many similarities to what has been handed down by the Yang Family, with a few stylistic differences, and also half of the Second Set: the first route of the Pao Chui. So altogether no more than two routines of Chen style still exist, with the rest being found only in Manuals. As far as the First Routine of Chen Chang Hsing's Boxing is concerned, there is a Mr. Fan from the Hung Ting district of Shanhsi Province who appended pictures and explanations to it and renamed in T'ung Pi Ch'uan. He has remembered how to count the records but has forgotten how to count his ancestors. This is in poor taste. We can infer from this that the boxing handed down in the Chen Family and the present day T'ung Pi Chuan are from the same source. Just as Lao Tze said: "Thirty spokes can converge upon a single hub. It is on the hole in the center that the use of the cart depends. A vessel is made from a lump of clay. It is the inside of the vessel, the empty space which makes this vessel useful. We can make doors and windows for a room, it is the living space in the room which we treasure. Thus while the tangible has advantages, sometimes it is the usage of the intangible which creates the value.

The postures of Tai Chi Chuan can be compared with the cart, vessel and room. And the 8 Trigrams and the 5 Elements, without forms or emblems, show the utility of the intangible. In any kind of boxing you should strive to be reborn daily and seek refinement unremittingly. The Master Key of Tai Chi uses the empty to revitalize the full. For instance if you are practicing Shaolin, and apply the Master Key, Shaolin boxing becomes transformed into Tai Chi Chuan. Or if you are practicing orthodox Chen, Yang or Wu styles but never consider the relationship between the postures and the 8 Trigrams or the 5 Elements, then your practice can never amount to more than just the visible movement, and it will not be real T'ai Chi Ch'uan at all.

Generally speaking, T'ai Chi is without form or symbol. It can penetrate into any boxing art from any source and transform it. When the 8 Trigrams are embraced in the hands, and the 5 Elements are transformed in the feet, "your appearance is like a hawk seizing a rabbit, and your spiritual insight is like a cat grabbing a mouse." This is genuine T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Therefore the secret is: "To enter the gate and be guided onto the correct path one requires verbal instruction from a Competent Master. If a person continually practices, and studies carefully, one's skill will take care of itself. That which today is labeled standardized forms from different styles have all evolved since the advent of the camera, prints, and drawings of postures. Because of differences in personality, as well as differences in body structure, there have been a great many styles which have become popularized. But in relationship to the heart and soul of T'ai Chi, it is a shame that most people regard only the external appearances, and talk about correct postures, and not correct theory and principles. This can be compared to "buying a coffer, but returning the pearl," that is, not knowing what it is that has the true value, thus causing The Master Key to be lost. This approach really missed the mark.

However, one can analyze the traditional styles from a different perspective. The Chen First Routine serves to mobilize the hands with the body, emphasizing soft movements as the fundamental principle, and emphasizing the use of coiling silk energy. T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a method of coiling silk, Chan Su Ching; there is forward twisting, backward twisting, left and right twisting, up and down twisting, inside and outside twisting, large and small twisting, clockwise and counter-clockwise twisting. You induce an opponent to enter and immediately twist him. Advance and immediately twist. These should not act separately. If they act separately the Yin and the Yang will not be coordinated and most people, ignorant of the reality of Chan Su Ching, and looking at it externally, will say it is too soft and does not have strength or force. During combat, the soft and the hard must be coordinated and one must continually define central equilibrium. Without this continually stressed long and painstaking practice, one will never penetrate the inner meaning. The shoulders must hang down, and the elbows sink and relax:

"As graceful as a Virgin greeting a stranger
"As fierce as a Tiger running down the Mountain
"The hands become like Libra's Balance
"And measure your presence,
"Or lack thereof.

The First Routine of The Chen System also combines Taoist Tao-Yin, and Tu-Na. (Stretching, and internal breathing exercises. In the West all of this is usually collectively called Chi Kung, and has sometimes been referred to as Taoist Yoga) This serves to exercise and train the body, develop the Chi, focus the mind-intent, and liberate the spirit, and adding another dimension to the development of a truly

Internal Boxing System. Chen's Second Routine motivates the body, expressed through the hands, and emphasizes the development of Yang Energy. There are many movements with the hands and feet where energy is issued forcefully. But these are not external movements where brute force is generated through muscle power alone. Reverse breathing is used to exhale and project energy through the body, issued like lightening, vocalized like spring thunder, suddenly bursting forth and causing great alarm.

When Chen Fa Ku went to Peking to teach in 1928, he gave a demonstration of the Pao Chui in the Honan Guild Hall. Afterwards several of the big square floor tiles in the hall were found to be broken, due to the power issued by his stamping feet. This alone shows the high level that his Kung Fu had reached.

There was a man named Shen Chia Chen who invited Master Yang Chen Fu to his home in order to receive private lessons. Master Yang felt that the development of his Yin energy was adequate, but that his Yang, or firm energy needed to be further developed. So Master Yang taught him individual postures for training the issuance of hard energy. These postures were never seen in Yang style T'ai Chi. Shen was doubtful, and did not at once accept the validity of this type of training until he saw Chen Fa Ku demonstrate the Pao Chui. Then he realized that the movements taught to him by Master Yang were the same movements excerpted from the form which he was to practice individually. We can deduce from this that after Yang Lu Chan had learned T'ai Chi from the Chen Village and returned home that in addition to passing his own refinements down to his children and grandchildren that he also passed along the corpus of the original Chen along with it. Three generations later they were still well versed in the issuing energy techniques of the Pao Chui.

The ability of Yang Pan Hou to issue energy was so firm and crisp that no one whom he encountered could resist being forcefully ejected. It is very clear that this is a result of long practice in the Fa Ching techniques of Pao Chui.

There was another man called Ma Shin Shu who learned the Wu style Tai Chi from his maternal Aunt's Husband, Li Yi Yu, who was a disciple of Hao Wei Jen, lineal stylistic descendant of Wu Yu Hsing. He often saw a Yang Shao Hu, Li Yi Yu, and Hao Wei Jen using the 8 Techniques of Ward-off, Roll-back, Press, Push, Pull, Split, Elbow-strike, and Shoulder-strike with hard energy. They also added techniques of dodge, revolve, bounce, and set aside, which are part of the 13 Torso Methods, mentioned in my book. The addition of these techniques made sure that there was not any overabundance of soft-energy. Among this group, Yang Shao Hu was considered to be the best. From this we can see that the earlier generations of the Yang Family up to Yang Chen Fu, and the earlier generations of the Wu Family up to Hao Wei Jen, were all practicing the Pao Chui in addition to

practicing and developing their own refinements, and Tai Chi Ch'uan as a whole.

The fundamental principles of the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan are going from relaxation to the development of soft energy, which is then further developed into hard energy, and from this point, (coming full circle), returning to soft energy and then relaxation. One of the highest guiding principles is: "Only soft without hard is called 'weak hands.' Only Hard and no Soft is called 'Hard Hands.' 10% Yin and 90% Yang is like a stick, 20% Yin and 80% Yang is called 'scattered hands,' 30% Yin and 70% Yang is still stiff, 40% Yin and 60% Yang will give the appearance of an adept, but it is only when there is a 50% split each way that one can be called an Artist. The skilled artist's every posture is a perfect integration of Yin and Yang, proceeding from the visible into the invisible, and proceeding from the tangible to the intangible, from Wu Chi to Tai Chi.

Everyone seems to think that all the postures of Yang style T'ai Chi Chuan are wide open and stretched, externally as soft as cotton, and internally as hard as steel. This is true but is certainly not a stage which can be arrived at overnight. After Yang Lu Chan had learned T'ai Chi Ch'uan at Chen Chia Kou and had returned home, the art passed through a period of refinement and further development which took three generations. What we know as Yang style did not develop all at once. But it is not only the sequence of the postures and the style in which they are performed that we are describing. Many people do not know that within the one set there are three practice methods: High, middle, and low. Most beginners practice the posture high, because their legs are weak. After a time they can begin practicing at the middle level. In Chinese this is called the Form of Four Levels: The eyes are level, the hands are level, the feet are level, and the thighs are level. Finally, one can progress to "low posture." In addition to the "stance levels," the form can also be practiced in three different "movement levels" Large movement, medium movement, and small movement. The large movements seems to make the postures wide and expanded and emphasizes soft energy, and is very good for cultivating health. Large movement is Yang Chen Fu's established norm which today is known as traditional Yang Style. The medium movement approach seeks to make each movement and posture in accord with "The Doctrine of the Mean." There is soft and firm. The internal energy must not go beyond certain limits. The movements are continuous without any severances, or deficiency, and the beginning and the end are performed at the same speed. This approach was taught by Yang Chien Hou and is presently represented as the Kuang P'ing Style. The Small Form makes each posture tight and compact, and it's movements are rapid and brisk. The hard is emphasized more than the soft. Each posture issues one inch energy, and in advancing and retreating the steps are very small. The hand always act as one unit with the waist and legs. It was handed down by Yang Fan Hou, but has now become almost lost.

As far as Yang Family T'ai Chi Ch'uan is concerned, there is one point which I would especially like to emphasize: Yang Lu Chan, his descendants, and the people around him did not concentrate or depend on "book-learning" either as a medium with which to grasp new information, nor as a medium with which to transmit information. They came to an understanding of the essence of Taoist philosophy after passing through the strenuous efforts of "trial by fire." As Lao Tze said: "Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water. But for attacking the hard and strong, there is nothing like it. For nothing can take its place." And again: "The weak overcoming the strong, and the soft overcoming the hard. Everyone is familiar with this, but none can put it into practice." Another saying: "The hard and the tough is the companion of death. The soft and the pliable is the companion of life." The highest guiding principle of Chen Family T'ai Chi Ch'uan is: "Only when one is 50% Yin and 50% Yang, with both is perfect balance, can one be called a fully skilled artist." and, "Only Yin and no Yang is called "weak hands." These ideas as a totality represent a theoretical breakthrough.

At a time when all the best boxers gathered in Peking, Yang Lu Chan won the title of "Yang Second to None." He did not win this title through a popularity contest. Even a very skilled artist who has balanced Yin and Yang, 50% evenly, may face a highly skilled opponent who can discover the clues to protecting himself, and counterattacking successfully. Only by combining these many things which we have discussed, coiling silk, strong internal energy, Tong Ching, which leaves no traces, with the force of steel hidden in Cotton, can one truly be a Superman of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

If you have been reading the issues regularly, you may recall the traditional story we printed recently, about a match that Yang Pan Hou had, when he was young, with Liu Shi Ching. Master Liu was a famous undefeated Shaolin Master, whom young Pan Hou chose to challenge in his very first challenge match. In this match Master Liu grabbed Pan Hou's wrist, and would not let go of it. Pan Hou suddenly issued a shaking energy, which Master Liu could not withstand, and threw the famous Master more than 3 feet away. Pan Hou was quite pleased with himself, and afterwards, he related his experience to his Father, Yan Lu Chan. Lu Chan listened to him, and then started to tease him. "You are quite pleased with yourself because you faced a famous and dangerous Master, and returned victorious, but it is really a pity that your clothing has been ripped. Is it this type of performance that you regard as a demonstration of T'ai Chi Ch'uan?" Pan Hou looked at his sleeve, and saw that it was indeed torn. He became ashamed of himself for boasting, and would not talk to his Father about it any further. Afterward his practice intensified itself, and his skill and internal energy became peerless.

Yang Chien Hou, also known as The Third Teacher, once met a man of a different style and lineage who was quite

Ch'uan, you will never be able to penetrate through to the heart. It must very certainly be believed that T'ai Chi Ch'uan is based on the theories of the I-Ching, which continually changes, seeking renewal and balance. But even though it is in a state of continual flux, it never leaves the source. The hands embrace the 8 Trigrams, revolving like the Sun and the Moon, and the feet trace the pattern of the 5 Elements, adding a further "spiraling." As far as the movements and postures are concerned, there are no hard and fast rules, and progress will come in relationship to the amount of time spent in practice.

From large open movement, to short compact movement; from fast to the leisurely; from the hands moving to the body moving; from the body moving to the mind moving; from that which has form to that which is formless; and finally from the external to the internal; and then T'ai Chi again reverting to Wu Chi.

Should one inquire: "What is the correct standard of body alignment, posture, and function?" The answer to this is that the mind and ch'i are the leader, and the flesh and bones are the follower. If one carefully examines what the ultimate purpose is: It is to enhance longevity, foster rejuvenation, and create a possibility of Immortality. This is the principal goal in practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and the investigation of it's sources and history.

Let us examine the development of Tai Ch'i from yet another perspective. We can compare the different styles to stages in the educational system. Chen Style represents the elementary, and Junior High School. Training in how to "coil silk energy," enables the beginner to grasp the basic theories, and understand how Yin and Yang develop into one another. This includes the hard and the soft, and their close connection to the 8 Trigrams. And of course, the creative and destructive cycles of the 5 Elements. The changing of steps which finally allows the body to move as a flexibly integrated unit. "When one part moves, all parts move." Pao Chui's issuing energy, the leaping and the stamping feet, accumulating hard to develop soft, like iron wrapped in cotton, establishing T'ai Chi Ch'uan's basic premise of: "There is no hardness which cannot be overcome," and, "In every battle, you are the victor."

Yang style is developed on the basis of Chen Style. It begins by taking the hard Yang issuing energy of the Pao Chui, and the soft coiling silk energy of the First Routine and further internalizing them. It uses more body movement, and less hand movements. This can be compared to the High School stage. Although in Yang Style softness has reached it's ultimate evolution, the steps are large and expanded, and the postures are comfortable and extended. When we come to the Wu Style, we notice that starting, elucidating, opening, and closing are it's principles. The steps and body movements are small and contracted. This resembles the College Level.

Let me make another example: Chen Style possesses both the Hard and the Soft. After studying it for a while, one can use it practically. It is like having enough cash to buy whatever you need. Yang Style is soft and more internal. Because you don't see the wads of cash, you can compare it to having a checking account. You get what you want by signing your name. Wu style resembles a credit card. You can hold it in one hand and buy things with the other.

Unfortunately, at the present time most students of T'ai Chi all begin with the Yang Style. Most of the books available hold the softness of Yang Style in high esteem. It is almost as though if it is not absolutely soft, then it cannot be called T'ai Chi Ch'uan. There is a Chinese saying: "Great wisdom seems like folly." Softness is certainly one of the great Aims of the Art, but this cannot be achieved in a short period. It is like someone trying to learn how to play the violin. At first there are very large clumsy motions and a noise to wake the dead. But all of the famous violinists pass through this phase. As far as children in kindergarten are concerned it is enough to let them recognize the alphabet and be able to count numbers. This type of analogy is the same with T'ai Chi. The different sets in the Chen, Yang, and Wu styles, closely resemble an educational curriculum. One begins first with Chen style, progresses to Yang, and finally to Wu. There are many people who have said that I do not know T'ai Chi! If, with one's whole life, one is unable to master one style, how can one master three simultaneously? I wish it was more generally recognized that it took three generations of uninterrupted genius before Yang Chen Fu's standardized Yang Form was finally formed. To return to the analogy of an expressive violinist. The driving rhythm of the movement of his hands creates music like the sound of pearls falling on a plate of jade. It is not possible for a beginner to do this only through imitation. T'ai chi demands intrinsic internal energy and not only movement. "All depends on the mind-intent, and not on external movement." When you have obtained softness, accompanied with internal energy, you are fulfilling the requirement of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Because, if otherwise, it is like having no cash in the Bank, and issuing a stream of bouncing checks. The different students of the Masters did not consider this sort of thing very carefully and they foolishly cut the Chen, Yang, and Wu Styles, into various fragments, put a fancy name on it, and called it "simplified style," or "short form." It is like putting a large collection of different foods in a pot, giving it a very enticing name, and calling it "Chinese Style." This type of psychology does not move in the direction of the development of culinary genius or T'ai Chi, and is in fact in opposition to correct principles. If we want to verify the source and history of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and adjust our practice as regards a more objective understanding of these principles, this type of attitude is the first thing we must discard.

Basing our practice firmly on the hands embracing the 8 Trigrams, and the feet tracing the pattern of the 5 Elements, let us begin practicing a real T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

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