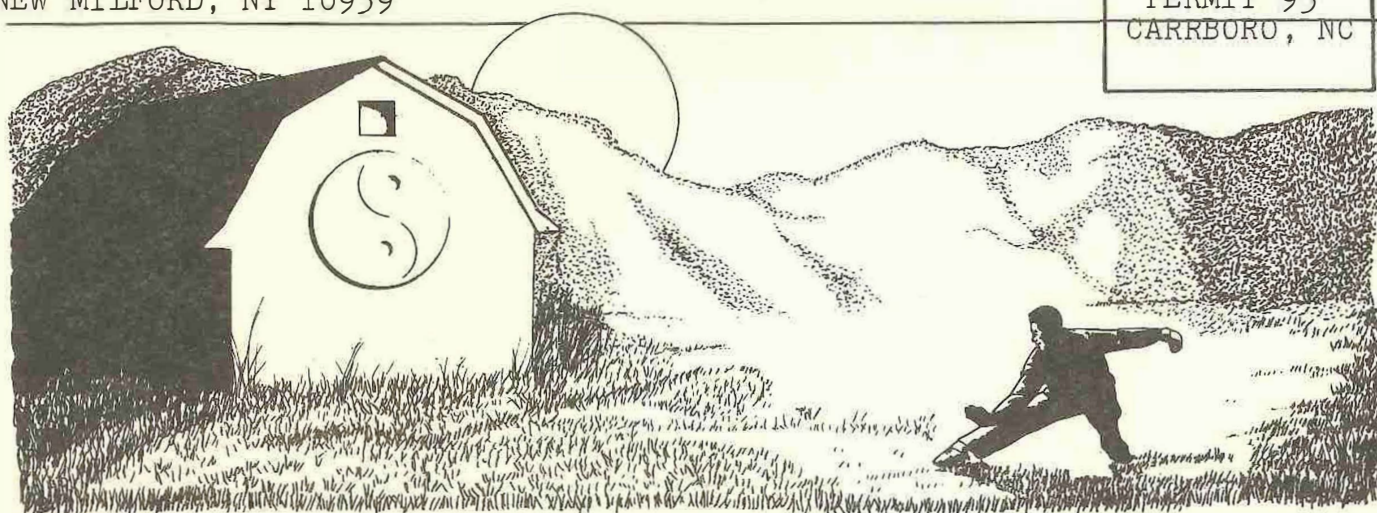


TAI CHI FARM, BOX 360,  
NEW MILFORD, NY 10959

POST PAID  
PERMIT 93  
CARRBORO, NC



PLEASE FORWARD, ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Vol. 1, No. 1

# The Master Key to T'ai Chi Ch'uan

There is a "Master Key" to Tai-Chi Chuan. Possessing it, if we are willing to devote time and energy to practice, we can continue to make progress throughout life to the limits of our natural ability. Without this key, we can only hope to improve our techniques to a certain level, and then will "sign away our time," as the *Song of Thirteen Postures* says. The Master Key defines the art of Tai-Chi Chuan. We can do the forms, the "ch'uan," and practice a variety of principles such as slowness, relaxation, straight spine, and certain hand positions. We can even reach high technical achievement; but without the Master Key, we should not call our art "Tai-Chi Chuan."

The Master Key is not related to any particular style. Instead, it makes one family of all the diverse forms of Tai-Chi. The forms and styles are analogous to rooms in the same hotel. Each room has a key whose superficial appearance differentiates it from all others, and provides the guest with access to that room, and to no other. Problems arise when guests begin thinking of their room as best, and the particular bumps and valleys, notches and grooves, straight or contoured edges in their key are essential, and should appear in everyone's key. As the external differences are given greater significance, "Tai-Chi Hotel" turns into "Chuan Condominiums." All the guests try their keys in one another's doors and say, "Your room is no good, because my key doesn't

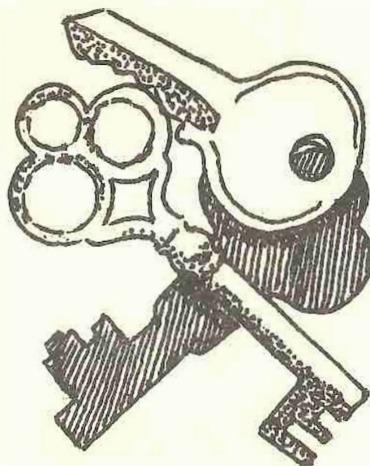
open your door, and I know my key works." This is happening among some Tai-Chi players today. Adherents of various styles become involved in describing individual differences as if they were fundamental. One might say, "The key to Tai-Chi Chuan has five notches of increasing depth in its upper edge"; another might counter, "The upper edge of the key must be smooth to permit it to turn either way." When instructors focus on the unique configuration of their own "keys", students are easily fooled, and mimic the person at the front of the class instead of seeking to apply the Master Key for themselves. However, just as the manager of a hotel has one master key which unlocks all doors, there is

one Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan that reveals which bumps and valleys in individual keys are merely superficial differences, and which are common to all other styles, and therefore define the essence of the art.

The Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan is so complete that it contains all other principles within it, yet so simple that some people will hear it and laugh, some will acknowledge it yet forget to practice it, and only a few will achieve mastery with it. Yet anyone can hear and immediately have some understanding of it. What is the Master Key? You do not have to take my word for it: I did not originate it. It has existed since ancient times, distinguishing Tai-Chi from other "ch'uan." I only wish to emphasize it so Tai-Chi players of all styles can see the common ground defining their practice, and work together toward mastery.

In the Tang Dynasty (618-905 A.D.), a hermit named Hsa Suan-Ming is said to have practiced a martial art similar to Tai-Chi Chuan "with the eight trigrams in the arms and five elements under the feet," which means all movement in accordance with the principles of the *I Ching*. In the tenth century, Chen Lin Hsi stated that no one can master Tai-Chi Chuan without studying the *I Ching*. These are early statements of the Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan.

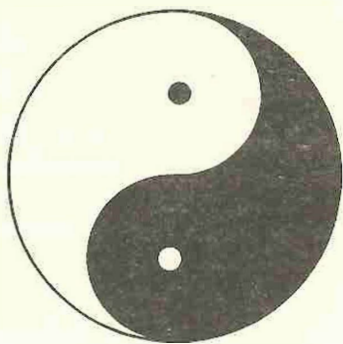
In the fourteenth century, Chang San Feng, who synthesized earlier forms of Tai-Chi boxing, Taoist



J. Dunbar

breathing techniques or ch'i kung, and the principles of the *I Ching* to define the art now known as Tai-Chi Chuan, wrote a treatise called "The Theory of Tai-Chi Chuan." At the end of that work he emphasizes the importance of thirteen postures, which correspond to the eight trigrams of the *I Ching* and the five elements. These concepts can be considered the Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan. All subsequent variations are based on this foundation.

Around 1970, Chi Chang Tao, an advanced student of the great modern master Cheng Man-Ch'ing, told me that his teacher said there were "eight trigrams in the hand." Chi did not understand this saying, and asked me about it because he thought my background in mathematics would enable me to explain the dynamics of hand movements in terms of the eight trigrams. I didn't understand then, but now, fifteen years later, I do.



From before Chang San Feng to the present, experts have recognized the Master Key which can transform any "ch'uan" into Tai-Chi Chuan. If karate practitioners applied the Master Key, their karate would become Tai-Chi. This sounds mysterious, but actually it is quite simple. There is a Chinese expression, "The highest thing is the simplest." As soon as I show you, you can see it immediately, for it seems natural. I might say initially "the eight trigrams in the arms" means that your hands move in unison, and your movements match perfectly those of your opponent; the "five elements under the feet" means to be able to step forward or back, to turn left or right, while remaining poised at the center. This may seem too simple; but the Master Key is not an academic or intellectual comprehension. The only way to understand it is to do it. Don't expect to get it by following a teacher.

Practice again and again by yourself to gain *tong chin*: "understanding energy" or self-knowledge; one day you will know, and will no longer feel the need to ask anyone about this or that.

The Master Key is not a short cut. "The highest is the simplest, but the simplest is also the most difficult." Practice in applying the Master Key is the work of a lifetime. Whether you have been studying thirty years or three months, ask yourself if your practice incorporates an effective method of embodying "the eight trigrams in the arms, the five elements under the feet."

If you want to understand the eight trigrams in the arms, for instance, you must practice the Chan Ssu Chin, which I have described in chapter three of *The Tao of Tai-Chi Chuan*. If you want to understand Chan Ssu Chin, you must understand the Tai-Chi Diagram, discussed in chapter two. Your practice might develop through three stages. First, you must learn not to move your arms independently of your body. Cheng Man-Ch'ing used to say that if the arms moved independently, one was just "doing exercise, not Tai-Chi." The arms must move around a center as the earth orbits around the sun. Study this by tracing the Tai-Chi Diagram with each hand singly, paying attention to the relationship between the Palm (Yin) and the back of the hand (Yang). When the palm is facing straight up, the hand shows the trigram "Kun" (☷). When the palm is facing down, the hand shows the trigram "Chien" (☰). Each hand manifests all eight trigrams as it passes around the circle, like the monthly cycle of the moon from new to full and back again.



Second, all parts of the body must exhibit revolution, similar to the rotation of the earth on its axis, which, when added to the circularity of its orbit, results in a spiraling motion through space. Study the Chan Ssu Chin exercise with both hands matching one another, like the sun and the moon. Matching may be complementary, where for instance the left hand shows the trigram "Tui" (☱) and the right hand shows "Ken" (☶); each hand showing Yin in an equal proportion to the Yang in the other hand. Matching may also be corresponding, where the hands move as identical or mirror images of one another. Third, your two hands must match one another in the solo form in preparation for being able to match the energy of a partner.

All arts have a "master key." For example, most people can learn to dance by taking lessons, following a teacher, or imitating others around them on the dance floor, and some dance professionally for years; but only a few become great dancers. The others learn the outer movements, but the great dancer possesses a "master key." Many people take piano, and of these, some are disciplined enough to become professional players, piano teachers, or even concert pianists; but only a few become great. The others may learn to put their fingers in the "right" places; the great pianist possesses a "master key." It is the same in the martial arts.

Long ago, someone got the idea for the art of monkey fist by watching a monkey. Now, a person may study "monkey fist" for twenty years and reach a high level of proficiency; but if he has never watched a monkey, his art cannot truly be called "monkey fist". The master key to the art of "Pa Kua" is the circular arrangement of the eight trigrams. Practitioners may imitate circular walking, but they must understand the eight trigrams for their art to truly be "Pu Kua." The master key to the Hsing-I is the relation of the five elements in each movement. The Tai-Chi player must learn both the eight trigrams and the five elements; but we have the same problem as other arts. Most students learn only to follow, and do not acquire knowledge of the Master Key. Lacking the Master Key, even after twenty years of study with the best teacher, you may have "ch'uan"—but it will not be Tai-Chi Chuan.

Some practitioners of monkey fist, Pa Kua, Hsing-I, and Tai-Chi would exclaim loudly against this, saying it is too theoretical, and useless for fighting. They would be right if the goal were form, but it is formlessness. They would be right if the Master Key were complicated: too abstract to be applied effectively. It is not. In Tai-Chi Chuan, the Master Key is the conscious embodiment of the fundamental way in which change occurs naturally in this world. This mechanism is exercised in ch'i kung, expressed in the five elements, and pictured in the Tai-Chi Diagram, which is the basis of the *I Ching*. The Tai-Chi Diagram is our "monkey."

Beware of being satisfied with your own level of understanding of these things. If you are willing to accept a platitude about the "natural harmony of opposites" as a summary of the Tai-Chi Diagram, you will never make progress. Take the Tai-Chi Diagram as your teacher, practice "Tai-Chi" as revealed in it, and you will begin to be able to read the trigrams and hexagrams as patterns of energy in yourself and others. No matter how many years you have studied, until you have made the effort to understand the Master Key you are not yet a student of Tai-Chi Chuan.

—Jou, Tsung Hwa

## EDITORIAL

By Jou, Tsung Hwa

The Tai Chi Farm reflects the ancient philosophy of the balance of yin and yang, complementary opposites which unite to form a whole.

The Yang aspect is the place itself: the 100 acres, forest, and cabins; a place to serve as a continuous education center for all Tai Chi teachers to share all styles and systems of Tai Chi. It is also a place for serious students to come and freely learn and share Tai Chi.

The Yin aspect is the writing, *Tai Chi Farm*. In this newsletter, teachers may share their systems, principles, experiences and breakthroughs. Students are encouraged to share their ideas, concerns, articles, questions.

As the place is the body of the Tai Chi Farm, the writing is the soul. Tai Chi Farm exists for all teachers and students to put in seeds, the principles of the classics that tie all systems and players together, and to harvest the fruits throughout the world.

# 太極拳

## What T'ai Chi Ch'uan Means

The term T'ai Chi Ch'uan is made up of several elements. The terms T'ai and Chi both carry the connotation of "extreme" or "excessive". Used together as a compound, the two terms suggest something like "the most extreme" or "the greatest of the great". This principle of T'ai Chi, as used in traditional Chinese philosophy, suggests the phenomenal world, the world of movement, activity, thought, and change. The familiar Yin/Yang symbol is actually called the "T'ai Chi T'u" or Tai Chi diagram, because it is believed that the phenomenal, everyday world, or "T'ai Chi" is composed of permutations and combinations of Yin and Yang. The world Ch'uan means, literally, "fist" or "boxing", so T'ai Chi Ch'uan means "the system of boxing based on the principles of T'ai Chi philosophy."

—by Alan Fox

## 1986 Programs Ready

by Angel Chiango

An exciting year lies ahead at the Tai Chi Farm beginning in April of 1986. We're looking forward to working with a diverse community of instructors including some of the world's most famous and respected Masters.

Preliminary work has been completed for the 1986 Schedule of Programs. From April through October, two and five-day courses will be offered, covering all styles of Tai Chi Chuan. Among the more than thirty-five courses planned are Meditation, Chi Kung, I Ching, and the Chinese language, to mention only a few. Another feature of the 1986 Program Year will be the now-traditional Chang San-Feng Festival.

Class attendance will be limited to maintain the quality of the instruction, although certain courses will be repeated in order to maximize the accessibility of the courses.

More detailed information on the 1986 Programs will be included in the next newsletter, and a catalog is being prepared.

Costs for tuition and lodging will be reasonable, and a limited number of work-study positions will be made available. Please let us know if you would be interested in such a position by returning the work-study application included in this newsletter.

We are excited about the prospect of sharing and growing with Tai Chi players of all styles from all over the world. We hope you can be a part of it.

# The T'ai Chi Farm Today

By Joe Beninati

The Tai Chi Farm, founded by Master Jou, Tsung Hwa, is located on a 100-acre tract of land in the rolling mountains just outside Warwick, New York—A short, one-hour drive from New York City. A stream passes from one end of the land to the other, feeding a pond that gently waterfalls away. Mostly wooded, the site is being developed for large numbers of Tai Chi players to come and share their Tai Chi, to learn from others, and to contribute to the development of this non-profit organization.

The Farm began as an idea in the mind of Master Jou, who is now dedicated to realizing this dream. More and more students are gathering around Master Jou to contribute their talents, time and energy to share in the development of *our* Tai Chi Farm. In exchange, Master Jou's perceptive and timely teaching of the principles of Tai Chi practice, philosophy and meditation are reward enough for those who share in this endeavor.

The Tai Chi Foundation purchased the Farm last December 7, 1984. Little development occurred over the winter, however 2 students stayed on the Farm part time. Since the Chang San Feng Festival this Spring (a Festival held annually by the Tai Chi Society) volunteers have been active making the Farm suitable for Tai Chi Players. Two offices have been set up for the use of the Farm. Cabins (there are 12 of them) are slowly being remodeled to be used by resident and visiting students. The small barn is presently under renovation so that a winter work-out area can be readied before the snow falls. There is also a large historic barn that we hope to renovate as well.

Several workshops have been held this past summer, including Tai Chi intensives, Tai Chi ruler, and special programs for Tai Chi instructors. A schedule of workshops has been prepared for the next season beginning March 31 and ending October 31, 1986. These include Master Jou's own specialities such as Chen style, Tai chi principles, and meditation. In addition, numerous Masters from around the country are being invited to share their understanding of Tai Chi

Chuan. A catalogue is being prepared and you will be informed as soon as this is ready for distribution.

The Tai Chi Farm has four main objectives as outlined by Master Jou. These are:

- (1) To develop and disseminate *knowledge* about Tai Chi Chuan.
- (2) To develop and disseminate good Tai Chi *techniques*.
- (3) To develop new and innovative Tai Chi *teaching methods*.
- (4) To help individuals become not only good Tai Chi players, but also to create strong, dependable and responsible humans.

Master Jou's dream is to develop the Tai Chi Farm as an integration of Western and Eastern skills and knowledge. As an image of this realization, the architectural dream

includes both Oriental and Western types of buildings.

Because the Farm is in the first stages of difficulty, we hope that all friends and Tai Chi players will contribute to the development and realization of the Tai Chi Farm—a place for all to come and spread the tremendous benefits of the practice of Tai Chi Chuan. The contribution of your time, talents or your dollars will be well rewarded.

Only one visit to the Farm and one class offered generously by Master Jou will convince you of the high intentions being developed at the Farm. Please address all inquiries to:

Master Jou  
Tai Chi Farm  
Box 360  
New Milford, NY 10959

## HELP!!!

We need your help. Assistance is needed with all aspects of producing this newsletter, including providing names for a mailing list, contributing ideas, articles, and money, and sharing the newsletter with friends and colleagues in the world of Tai Chi Chuan. Please return the following form to get on our mailing list and/or to volunteer time, energy, or money to the project.

- 
- I'd like to be included on your mailing list.  
 Yes, I would like to volunteer to help out. I can:

- 
- Enclosed you will find a check to cover the cost of producing and distributing the newsletter and other mailings.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please feel free to include any ideas you might have for the newsletter on this form, and return the form to the Farm.

---

### WORK-STUDY INFORMATION REQUEST FORM

- Please send me more information on the 1986 Program Work-Study Positions.