



HOW TO TEACH TAI CHI CHUAN

by Jou Tsung Hwa

There are many approaches to the art of Tai-Chi Chuan. Some instructors incline by nature, ability, or the emphasis of their own teachers toward a philosophical approach; others present Tai-Chi primarily as sport or exercise; still others are most interested in it as a martial art. Most teachers agree that all facets of Tai-Chi Chuan are important, but few can balance their instruction to reflect the complete picture. Some spend more class time on stretching and agility, some emphasize ch'i kung and internal exercises, some teach various applications, some teach only a solo form. While it is neither possible nor desirable to attempt to standardize a single approach to Tai-Chi, all instructors must continually decide what is important to the development of their students. To do this, they themselves need an overview: a vision of the Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan.

The Chinese define two qualities in martial arts ability. Good physical technique without understanding is called wu fu (武夫). A person with this quality is similar to the western stereotype of a "jock." These individuals are not necessarily dumb. They usually have physical talent or ability that they came by naturally and developed through a regimen of physical training and conditioning.

They therefore believe that philosophical concepts are useless or, at best, decorative.

The contrasting quality is zhishangtanbing (纸上谈兵): good theoretical knowledge but no physical skill. The individual with this quality would be similar to an arm-chair general or ivy-tower intellectual. These theoreticians are fascinated with the idea of Tai-Chi: its principles, history, and fine-sounding concepts. They promise their students physical prowess, yet shrink from demonstrations of their own skill and belittle those with wu fu. Exemplars of wu fu are right in saying that empty talk is worthless. Those with zhishangtanbing do not practice what they preach and must always be making excuses about the difficulty of it or the length of time it takes. Yet those with wu fu neglect the mind, and thereby miss the key which makes the art of Tai-Chi ultimately internal.

What kind of student do you want? Do you want those with "wu fu" or those with "zhishangtanbing"? What kind of student do you feel your current teaching methods will most likely produce? Tai-Chi is based on harmonizing yin and yang: it is necessary to have both knowledge and technique. The balance of these qualities is called ruxia (儒侠): the idea of the scholar/athlete.

Instilling this quality in students is the duty of conscientious teachers. In the remainder of this article, I will suggest a few principles to assist in the design and delivery of Tai-Chi Chuan instruction.

1. Emphasize personal practice.

Teachers must be good examples of this to their students. Do not delude yourself or your students into thinking that class time "counts" as Tai-Chi practice. The energy of a Tai-Chi class is very different from the energy which is accessible through private practice. The former is a kind of collective performance, an externalized display; the latter is a connectedness with deeper levels which results in the accumulation of tong chin (comprehension). If you hope to make progress, you must not depend on others for your Tai-Chi.

2. Tolerate individuality in light of the goal.

Everyone is unique. Each person moves naturally in a slightly different manner, even when performing a "standardized" form. Many instructors place undue emphasis on external corrections at a time when students need to be discovering the elements of the Master Key within motions that are most natural for them. Before they can learn the rules of the Human Stage (see Chapter 5 in The Tao of Tai-Chi Chuan), there is a period when we must let students do what they want to do, such as lean to one side or exhibit some stiffness. During this period, if we correct them they will just become worse; we can discourage them by being too strict too early. Beginners simply cannot relax their hands immediately. Yet some instructors waste months and even years of their students' time shifting a hand here or a foot there to make them look like some ideal, instead of endeavoring to impart an understanding of the Master Key. I am not anti-form; but in Tai-Chi, form is simply a medium through which to practice the energies that lead to formlessness.

3. Encourage students to strive to understand the Master Key. The Master Key to Tai-Chi Chuan is represented by the eight trigrams of the I Ching and the five elements. They are not merely philosophical concepts, but patterns of energy which must be

embodied if you wish to do Tai-Chi rather than just "chuan." Explain to your students each trigram, its symbol and meaning, and the relation of these patterns to Tai-Chi Chuan. For example, the back of the hand is yang, the palm is yin. As the hand moves around an imaginary sphere, the trigrams are expressed in the hand formations. Each time the hand moves in Tai-Chi Chuan, a trigram appears. As you learn to read these patterns of energy, you can learn to respond with complementary patterns. Currently, I do not teach forms to beginners. We work instead with exercises that incorporate practice of the eight trigrams and five elements; then we work on matching both hands around a "ball" and mirroring with a partner. This leads to the chan ssu chin (silk cocoon energy) exercise described in Chapter 3 of The Tao of Tai-Chi Chuan. Chan ssu chin enables students to recognize the Master Key in their practice of any style of Tai-Chi.

My present way of teaching is not the only way. To be committed to one way of doing things is a form of double weightedness. Yet I feel that it is important to move from simple to complex: first the duality of up and down, left and right, forward and back; then the four images represented for example by the phases of the moon (young yang, full yang, young yin, full yin); then the eight "gates." The five elements, for instance, can be understood first in the shifting of the weight from central equilibrium to a front or rear stance, combined with the turning of the waist to left or right. Each aspect of the Master Key should be taught at a level which students can understand. There is room here for unlimited creativity on the part of instructors.

4. Introduce in each class a principle from the Classics or a story from Tai-Chi history.

These principles and stories are not merely flowery irrelevancies with which to spice up your talks. The more you ponder them, the more they will emerge in your teaching as real instructional objectives accompanied by physical exercises. Give reading assignments in the classic writings related to Tai-Chi. These include not only the Tai-Chi Classics, contained in my book

The Tao of Tai-Chi Chuan and in many other books on Tai-Chi, but also the I Ching, the Tao Te Ching, and The Art of War by Sun Tzu. These could be considered required texts for courses in Tai-Chi Chuan. Encourage your students to go directly to these sources and read them again and again.

5. Study natural laws and phenomena. Tai-Chi is the embodiment of principles that are at the heart of physics and other sciences: action-reaction, gravitation, orbit and rotation, etc. The founder of Tai-Chi Chuan, Chang San Feng, had only nature as his teacher. We have the synthesis of his observation and experimentation, augmented by generations of players. Yet we, too, can benefit greatly by returning for inspiration to nature itself, assisted by more recent scientific insights.

6. Be open-minded. If you are serious in desiring to set your students on the path of self-development, I recommend that you teach the lessons of the major styles of Tai-Chi in order of their historical evolution: first Chen style (first and then second routines), then Yang style, then the Wu style of Wu Yu-Hsing. I discussed this at length in "Tai-Chi History: Model for Personal Development." This progression, from the dynamic and expressive Chen to the subtle and concentrated Wu, is a pattern for a comprehensive Tai-Chi curriculum. It illustrates how instruction might be systematically planned. If players would practice these forms in sequence with full spirit and study points 4 and 5 above, they could maximize their acquisition of skills and understanding. If you now study only one style, inquire of the best available sources the characteristics of other styles. Incorporating these characteristics into the form you know can open new doors for you in your practice. Each form provides only one perspective on Tai-Chi, like a single strand in a string design of the Tai-Chi diagram. Visit other teachers' classes, attend workshops, and encourage your students to do this. Also, observe those who are skilled in other arts. Be open to insight wherever you may find it.

7. Do not confuse means with ends. For example, simple imitation is a necessary technique at first; but expert mimicry of a master's postures is not the goal of Tai-Chi. Students will not get advanced knowledge through imitation. The principles of Tai-Chi do not pass from the body of the teacher through the eyes of the student; the student must cultivate them from within. Another example of this confusion is the idea that the number of years one has been involved with Tai-Chi is somehow equivalent to expertise. Time simply provides opportunity for development; it is not a measure of development. A student who has made good use of three years may show greater progress than one who has practiced once or twice a week for six.

Form repetition, too, is a means not an end. Do not suppose there is a magic inherent in Tai-Chi forms that works automatically if the form is repeated routinely. Each individual must fill a form with spirit and intention every time it is played. Inspire students to do their best, so that they make a little progress each time. See, however, that they do not overdo: there should be no hurry or pressure to exceed physical limitations.

8. Treat all students equally. Tai-Chi instructors must regard all individuals as Tai-Chi players and give each the same quality of instruction. For example, women and men should be treated equally. If you are demonstrating techniques, use women as often as you use men. Every student, regardless of sex, age, or ability should have equal opportunity in all activities, such as when students are allowed to lead the class, or in push-hands. If Tai-Chi Chuan itself were personified, it would be like the Sage in verse 5 of the Tao Teh Ching, viewing all people impartially, as if they are figures made of straw. Instructors can constructively adopt this attitude. Tai-Chi makes no distinctions, but ruthlessly goes to work to bring players to their highest personal potential. The speed of this process should not depend on a differential in instruction, but on each player's own dedication.

9. Avoid sexual involvements with students and potential students.

This is a difficult subject, as there are few who are without "sin" in this area and we tend to be touchy and resistant when advice seems to run counter to desires we wish to indulge. Nevertheless, I feel it is important to share my views with teachers who are sincerely devoted to Tai-Chi. My painful experience over a number of years was that the energy Tai-Chi cultivates can too easily be lost in sexual involvements between teacher and students. Though its uses differ, energy is energy. Electricity, for example, can power a toaster or a streetlight. Money, another form of energy, can be spent out-of-hand on entertainment, or it may be accumulated toward the purchase of a house or an education. Similarly, our life-force can be squandered so that we have no time, inclination, or energy left for our goals, or it may be saved and reinvested. Tai-Chi shows us the way.

Students are naturally attracted to those who seem to possess what they are seeking. Teachers are naturally attracted to those who seem to value their art. Tai-Chi, the original object of the teacher-student relationship, is often forgotten: exchanged for a cheaper, less-durable commodity. In this situation, someone must take responsibility to "know better." Let us not tempt newcomers to trade their fledgling interest in Tai-Chi for intimacy, when we know Tai-Chi will pay them handsome benefits into old age. Few relationships can make this claim.

Another trap for an instructor's ego is the temptation to appear to be proficient in esoteric sex. Popular books to the contrary, sexual yoga is scarcely possible in this culture and time. Such practices are only feasible by adepts acting within far different circumstances. I have found that attachments between teachers and students drain energy away through physical and emotional channels; they usually run a short course and often result in bitterness and misunderstanding. Most pertinent to this article, these attachments reduce the teacher's effectiveness in carrying forward his goals for other

students and for Tai-Chi Chuan, though many of us on various power trips are willfully blind to the effects of our own actions.

I am not preaching morality, nor do I wish to appear judgmental regarding your personal affairs. We are talking about energy and its cultivation. The Chinese have a proverbial saying, "A rabbit eats grass, but not around its own home." Your Tai-Chi classes are "home." The moral is, Tai-Chi teachers would do far better to make Tai-Chi the sole basis of their relations with students and potential students. Do not promise Tai-Chi and deliver interpersonal entanglement.

The Tai-Chi teacher's job is to impart, by precept and example, a way for students to develop on their own; to inspire them to practice outside class, and to plan instruction in a sequence that is developmentally realistic according to an overview of the art. There are many stories about the fighting prowess of Tai-Chi experts, but the greatest advances in the art have been made by those with ruxia, such as Wang Tsung Yueh and Wu Yu Hsing, who have achieved understanding as well as physical ability. Those like Yang Lu Chan, whose skill was undoubtedly great but who did not possess a corresponding conceptual ability, are not able to transmit the benefits of their practice past one generation. The instructor offering a streamlined version of Tai-Chi to class after class of transient beginners faces a special challenge: how to make a connection between these seekers and Tai-Chi. Tradition tells us the true teacher is within. The most valuable outer instruction, then, will relentlessly redirect our wandering attention to the reality of certain timeless principles and toward the unavoidable necessity of personal discipline.

DISCOVERING A NATIONAL TREASURE: PART TWO OF AN INTERVIEW WITH MASTER WU DO-NAN

by Jou, Tsung Hwa

Editor's note: In the previous issue of Tai Chi Farm, Master Jou introduced Wu Do-Nan, a 102-year-old Tai Chi master who allowed an interview during the 1985 Tai Chi Tour to China. We learned of his sickly childhood and rigorous Tai Chi training under Wu Chien-Chyan. In part two of the series, we learn more about Wu Do-Nan's training and his interest in health and longevity.

Learning from Yang Chao-Hsiung

Master Wu's new teacher was no relief from the rigors of study with Wu Chien-Chyan. Yang Chao-Hsiung was a tough teacher, much like his Uncle Yang Yu who, because of his strictness, did not have many students. Many legends surround the life of Yang Chao-Hsiung. It is said that he taught so aggressively that few could bear his beatings, and that often when he punched, his fist would withdraw with blood on it. His achievement in Tai Chi Chuan was so great that it is said "to beat the enemy with closed eye's is Yang's Tai Chi."

I asked Master Wu why his teacher had so few students to clarify these legendary stories. Master Wu explained that Yang Chao-Hsiung did not talk, but only demonstrated to his students. Rather than teach a whole form, he only showed a few postures. Master Yang would say "Press" and students would Press for days on end. Finally, the students would complain they felt nothing special. "Good question!" Master Yang would respond, and then he would proceed to demonstrate the power of his Press on the questioning students without verbal explanation.

"Now do you understand?" the teacher would ask his bruised students. Even when the students didn't understand, they were reluctant to ask further, fearing another demonstration of Master Yang's Press.

Once Wu Do-Nan cleverly responded that he "understood a little bit."

Master Yang then asked Wu Do-Nan to press another student, but when nothing happened, Master Yang had Wu come and experience Press from the teacher, again and again.

Soon the students stopped asking questions.

The power of each posture was taught in this way, with many demonstrations from Master Yang. The school had little furniture as chair after chair was broken by these question-and-answer sessions.

Another reason Master Yang had so few students was his teaching of the "seven inch shoulder strike," originating with the Chen Family's Tai Chi and a part of the traditional Yang Tai Chi form. The student was required to use the shoulder to strike at a point seven inches from the ground on the calf, practiced by striking under a table.

Even at 102, Master Wu still remembers with fear the teaching methods of Yang Chao-Hsiung. After 4 years of training, Master Yang decided that Wu Do-Nan had learned all he could and asked him to leave to develop by himself. He returned only on special holidays to show respect to Master Yang.

Wu Do-Nan's Views on Life and Death

Master Wu was a professor of Archaeology, teaching in several universities; aside from learning Tai Chi, he studied wrestling, Hsing I, Pa Kua, and Tong Bei. Because of his professional career and interests, he researched the martial arts in China and catalogued more than 2000 different styles. Two very soft styles he noted were Mein Chuan, and in Shaolin the Mein Tsung Chi, but he considers neither of them Tai Chi Chuan. According to Wu Do-Nan, softness is not the only characteristic of Tai Chi Chuan--to him, Tai Chi is in a class by itself.

He published several books, including Wu Do-Nan's Tai Chi Chuan, and Scientific Method of Tai Chi Chuan. He also published a book about Tai Chi sword form. His main interests were, however, longevity and rejuvenation, which he researched throughout his life. Wu Do-Nan feels that people are at the height of their mental and physical powers in their

forties and fifties, yet many die soon after, leaving a tremendous loss to the person and to society. His researched focused on slowing down the process that leads to natural death. Our natural lives can be lived fully, like trees who live in the forest several hundred years, or they can be cut short like trees that are cut down for use and thus do not live out their natural lives.

Unlike the trees, we often cut ourselves down with smoking, drinking, drugs, and poor living. Master Wu feels that our natural lives are like that of a candle--burning brightly, alert, alive and healthy until the final seconds of our natural existence. We simply enjoy our natural lives until nothing moves any more: the end of our natural existence. This is Master Wu's concept of death.

THE SECRETS OF WU DO-NAN'S LONGEVITY

The classic literature about Tai Chi Chuan tells us that longevity is a major purpose of Tai Chi. Chang San Feng, in an article about the theory of Tai Chi Chuan, described the purpose of Tai Chi as not only for martial objectives, but also to attain a healthy life and longevity. In "Song of the Thirteen Postures" it is written: "What is the purpose and philosophy behind Tai Chi Chuan? Rejuvenation and prolongation of life beyond the normal span. So an eternal Spring."

Longevity, according to Chinese legend, is classified in four levels: Highest, over 100 years; Medium, 80 to 100 years; Lower, 60 to 80 years; Premature death, below 60 years.

Examining the documented records of the lives of Tai Chi masters from the last 100 years, documentation shows their attainment of longevity never reached the highest levels.

--Chen Ching-Hsin, Yan Lew-Shan's teacher, 82 years.

--Chen Fu-Ku, grandson of Chen Ching-Hsin, 70 years.

--Chen Ching-Ping, Chen form master and creator of Shiao-jar (compact form), 73 years.

--Wu Yi-Hsing, student of Chen Ching-Ping and founder of the Wu school, 68 years.

--Li Yi Yu, Wu Yi-Hsing's nephew and student, 60 years.

--Yang Lew-Shan, student of Chen Ching-Hsin and founder of the Yang school, 70 years.

--Yang Yu, son of Yang Lew-Shan, 55 years.

--Yang Chian, son of Yang Lew-Shan, 78 years.

--Yang Chao-Hsiung, son of Yang Chian and grandson of Yang Lew-Shan, 68 years.

--Yang Chen-Fu, also son of Yang Chian, 53 years.

--Wu Chian-Chyan's father, student of Yang Lew-Shan, 72 years.

--Cheng Man-Ching, student of Yang Chen-Fu, 75 years.

Of these masters, only Chen Chang-Hsin attained even medium longevity. Yang Chen-Fu, who attained very high achievement in Tai Chi Chuan, died very young at age 53, a great loss to Tai Chi Chuan. In The Tao of Tai Chi Chuan, page xv, I discuss this loss:

"There is only one warning I would like to give; although the practice of Tai Chi Chuan can promote good health, it cannot help people who do not take care of themselves. For example, the great master, Yang Chen-Fu, achieved a very high level in Tai Chi Chuan. In a book on Tai Chi Chuan, which was published in 1939, Tseng Chao-Jen, Yang Chen-Fu's last student, described his master's posture of Golden Pheasant Stands on One Leg as follows: "My master, when he was young, met his elbow to his knee in the posture. However, as he grew older, his stomach became as big as a drum. Thus, he was unable to touch elbow and knee. In fact, they were several inches apart."...When he was young, Yang Chen-Fu lived in Beijing and had an orderly daily life. Hsu Yu-Sen points out in his Tai Chi Chuan book published in the 1930's that Yang and Hsu practiced the Tai Chi Chuan solo exercise at least twelve times daily in the Pao-Fu temple in Beijing. Later, Yang went to Nanking, Shanghai, etc. to teach Tai Chi. The move to the south part of China from the pleasant countryside of Beijing meant a change of environment and

DEAR TAI CHI PLAYER:

The first year of operation of Tai Chi Farm is coming to a close. Six newsletters have been published, each a little better and more informative. We completed an ambitious summer workshop schedule with special guest instructors and famous Tai Chi masters. Although we would have liked more students, the summer program was a success and we learned a lot about the interests and needs of Tai Chi players. A very special Chang San Feng festival in June brought over 200 Tai Chi players to the Farm for workshops, demonstrations, and informal sharing.

I hope you were able to take advantage of these programs and will return next year for more training and sharing with other students and teachers.

The Farm itself has improved greatly, thanks to the hard work of many people. The Chang Building is now a beautiful room for practice and instruction, and the new showers have improved our environment as well. A new lawnmower and a new rock garden have added to the natural beauty and peacefulness of the Farm. More facilities for practice, fellowship and easier living are planned for 1987. Each improvement to Tai Chi Farm draws us closer to my dream of a

Tai Chi institution that will bring players and masters of all forms together.

Now we need some help from each of you. First, we need your subscriptions to this newsletter, Tai Chi Farm, in order to continue its publication. We would also welcome your ideas for improving the newsletter and any contributions you may make. The next issue, to be published in January, will announce the schedule for the 1987 workshops and special events.

We would also appreciate any reactions or ideas you have for improving the summer program. We are now designing the schedule for next year, and we would like to know what encouraged you to come the Tai Chi Farm and also what kept you away if you could not come this year. In order for the programs to continue, we must have increased attendance at the workshops, so your ideas will help us to increase the participants.

Thank you for making our first year a successful one, and I hope to see all of you in the coming year.

Jou Tsung Hwa

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Discovering a National Treasure, continued

lifestyle. Because of increased travel and social activities, Yang Chen-Fu did not have as much time for his daily practice of Tai Chi Chuan. He gradually became very fat and died in his fifties."

Tai Chi can give longevity and health; however, each person must also take care of himself or herself, or Tai Chi is of no value.

The Example of Wu Do-Nan

Master Wu Do-Nan provides us with a living document of the power of Tai Chi Chuan to increase our lives, not just a traditional legend that cannot be substantiated, such as the claim that Chang San-Feng lived to be 250

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years old. Perhaps through questioning Master Wu we can discover his secret to longevity.

I decided to compare our common knowledge of what contributes to longevity to Master Wu Do-Nan's life and attitude. I considered these factors: a peaceful and tranquil mind; lack of bad habits, such a drinking, smoking and use of drugs; concern for diet and nutrition; regular exercise; moderate but regular sexual activity; and standard daily routines.

In Part 3, Master Jou will apply each of these factors contributing to longevity to information he received from Master Wu Do-Nan, to determine his longevity "secrets."



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