

T'AI CHI CH'UAN CLASSICS

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the following translations were based initially on *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan: The Literary Tradition* by Lo, Inn, Amacker, and Foe. (I recommend this book as one of the must have volumes in an enthusiast's library.) By comparing and contrasting with other translations, I have made changes in the English wording, but not in the underlying ideas. I've been collecting commentary from a variety of sources, both written and oral, as well as my own thoughts/observations. Maybe in a few years I'll be ready to post them also.

The Classics frequently use prehistoric mystic terminology from T'ai Chi Ch'uan's philosophical roots in Taoism and traditional Chinese medicine. For the beginner, the use of these specialized terms may seem to compound the difficulty of understanding some concepts. After long study and practice, however, it eventually becomes clear that there is no English language vocabulary for expressing some of the important ideas for moving towards mastery in T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Borrowing terms from Chinese/Taoism may actually be less cumbersome than trying to attach new meanings/connotations to English words.

Sometimes a passage will refer to the practice of the Solo Form, sometimes to application, and sometimes to the internal aspects of the art. Not every passage necessarily relates to all aspects of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

The Classics are generally cited as the authoritative source on T'ai Chi Ch'uan principles by Yang, Wu and other styles that have branched off from the original Chen Family Styles. The authenticity of any documents prior to Yang Lu-chan is questioned, and there appears to be a sense among some Chen stylists that the attribution of some of the Classics to historical/quasi-mythological figures was an attempt by early practitioners to avoid giving full credit for the development of T'ai Chi Ch'uan to the Chen Family. There is apparently a tradition in Chinese

T'AI CHI CLASSICS – YANG CHENG-FU'S IMPORTANT POINTS

These principles of movement have been passed down by **Tai Chi Chuan** Masters. Most known is Yang Cheng-Fu's Important Points, shown below. Please notice that the statements are expressions of the body moving as a whole.

The rules are exposed to show you what to train in the form. To establish a body which is thrown open, you must know and train these indispensable rules. They are very precise guidelines on which sensations in body and mind you have to look for and focus on during training.

Only when these principles have become active you actually train **Tai Chi Chuan**. It is not enough - as many think - to know and train the choreography as such.

The choreography is merely the painting. The principles of movement are the light, which makes the picture emerge.

Know the rules - Follow the rules - Never deviate from the rules - Spiritualize the rules



Distinguish Full and Empty

Distinguishing solid and empty is the first and fundamental principle of Tai Chi. If your body center rests in your right leg, then your right is solid, and your left leg is empty. If your body center rests in your left leg, then your left leg is solid, and your right leg is empty.

When you can clearly make this distinction, your movements will be light, agile, and effortless. If not, your steps will be heavy and clumsy, and you are easily unbalanced due to the instability of your stance.

The philosophy of Yin and Yang is the underlying principle of change in stepping.



The Energy at the top of the Head should be light and sensitive.

Hold the head erect and with ease in order for the spirit to rise. If force is used, the back of the neck will be stiff, and the circulation of blood and Qi will be impeded. There should be a natural, light and sensitive feeling. If not, the spirit will be unable to rise up.

In order to achieve the above, it is important that the neck is held straight, but very relaxed and alive. Keep your mouth natural with the tongue touching the upper palate. Avoid clenching your teeth or gazing out with an angry look.

Keep your sacrum straight and slightly tucked under. If not, your spine will be affected, and your spirit will not be able to rise.



Sink the Chest and raise the Back

There should be a slight drawing in of the chest, which allows the Qi to sink to the Dan Tien. Avoid protruding the chest as this will cause the Qi to rise which, will lead to top heaviness, and the soles of the feet to float.

Raising the back means that the Qi adheres to the back. If you can sink your chest, your back will naturally rise. If you can raise your back, your power will come from your spine enabling you to overcome any opponent. Thus the Qi can sink to the **Dan-Tien**, and also rise in the back.

If this principle is not understood correct, it will not be possible to obtain **Geng** (rootedness) in the feet, and the whole body will be unstable.

Sink the chest and raise the back are similar to when a cat is in readiness to launch an attack on its prey.



Relax the Waist

It is said the waist is the well spring of your vital energy.

The waist is the commander of the body. All the movements originate here. If the waist is relaxed and loosened, the foundation, that is, your legs will be stable, enabling you to issue power. Changes in full and empty derive from the moving of the waist.

If you lack power in your movements, look for the weakness in your waist and legs. If you can relax the waist correct, the feet will have power, and our foundation will be stable.



Sink the Shoulders and drop the Elbows

The shoulders should relax and hang downwards. If the shoulders are raised, then the chi rises, and the whole body cannot summon up its power. If this is not practiced, the weight of the whole body will be in the upper part of the body. Thus we will not be able to use **Tai Chi Chuan** as a martial art, and the whole body will be without root.

The elbows must relax and point downwards. If the elbows are raised, the shoulders will become tense, inhibiting your ability to discharge your opponent to any great distance. Raising the elbows or shoulders is similar to breaking the Jing which occurs in the external martial art systems.



Seek Serenity in Activity

The external martial art systems consider leaping and crouching to be of value. They exhaust their energy and after practice, they are out of breath. Tai Chi uses serenity to counter activity. Even when you are moving, you remain tranquil. When practicing the postures, the slower you move, the better the result. Slowness enables your breath to become deep and long with the chi sinking to the **Dan Tien**. This will naturally prevent the pulse rate from elevating.

It is important to practice the movements slowly, so that you can understand the meaning within the movements. Practicing slowly helps to regulate your breathing enabling your breath to become deep and long allowing your chi to sink to the **Dan Tien**. Practicing in this manner also prevents the fault of top heaviness which is caused by the Qi rising up.



Use the Mind - and Not Strength or Brute Force

The classics say: Only from the highest softness comes hardness.

This principle recommends the practitioner to try to loosen tension in the whole body when training in order to cultivate the awareness in the movements, and thus gradually be able to master **T'ai Chi Ch'uan** fully. This is where **T'ai Chi Ch'uan** distinguishes from all other martial arts.

So according to the Tai Chi Classics, you use the mind and not brute force. In practice, your whole body is relaxed; not even using an ounce of brute force. If you employ brute force, you restrict the flow of energy through your sinews, bones, and blood vessels. This will inhibit your freedom of movement, preventing you from achieving agility, sensitivity, aliveness, circularity, and naturalness.

You may ask: "How can you have power without using brute force?" By making use of the meridians in the body. Meridians are a network of pathways which transport chi throughout the body. They connect the superficial, interior, upper and lower portions of the human body, making the body an organic whole. The meridians are similar to the rivers and streams of the earth. If the rivers are open, then the water flows freely. If the meridians are open, then the chi flows. If the meridians are blocked as a result of using stiff force, then the circulation of chi and blood become sluggish. Hence, your movements will not be nimble, and even if a hair is pulled, your whole body will be in a state of disorder.

Although your abdomen is full and alive, there is no force being used. For the Qi to sink down to the **Dan Tien** slowly and naturally, the mind needs to be relaxed. By deeply relaxing while performing your Tai Chi movements, your Qi will move freely to every part of your body. This will benefit the body greatly.

On the other hand, if you tense your mind and forcefully try to move your Qi, or use unnatural methods to circulate it, it is more than likely that blockages will occur which are harmful to your health.

When you are able to use your mind and not brute force, then wherever your mind goes, your chi follows. After a long period of practice and Qi circulating freely every day, you develop **Jing** (an internal power which is different from hard force). This is what the Tai Chi Classics means by "from true softness comes true hardness". The arms of one who has Tai Chi kung fu will feel extremely heavy; like steel wrapped in cotton. People who practice external martial art systems look strong when they exert hard force. However, when they are not bringing their hard force into use, they are light and floating. You can see that this merely a superficial kind of strength. Instead of using the mind, they use brute force, which makes them easy to manipulate. Hence not worthy of praise.



Coordination and Unity of Upper and Lower Body

According to the Tai Chi Classics the root is in the feet, issued through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed through the fingers. From the feet through the legs to the waist forms one harmonious chi.

If just one part is not synchronized, there will be confusion. So when the hands, waist, and feet move, your gaze needs to follow in unison. This is what is meant by harmony of the upper and lower body. If one part of the body is not in concordance with the rest, it will result in chaos.

When you first learn Tai Chi, your movements are larger and more open than those of a seasoned practitioner. The larger movements ensure that your waist and legs are moving in concordance, and all parts of the body are in harmony.



The Unity of Internal and External

What **Tai Chi Chuan** trains is the spirit. The spirit is the leader and the body is at its command. I.e.: When You open and close in the movements, you must also open and close in the mind.



Continuity without Interruption.

The external martial art systems employ brute force which is stiff and unnatural. This force stops and starts; moves in a jerky fashion. When the old force is finished before the new one has begun, this is the time when one is most vulnerable to attacks.

In Tai Chi you train the body to use the mind and not brute force. From the beginning to the end, the movements are continuous without stopping, like an endless circle. This is what the Classics means by a great river flowing continuously and never ending or moving the Jing like reeling silk from a silk cocoon.

The above conveys the idea of stringing the movements together into one harmonious Qi. If your movements stop and start, you will be easily taken advantage of by your opponent because you have exhausted your old strength, and the new power is not yet born.

In motion the whole body should be light and agile,
with all parts of the body linked
as if threaded together.

The **ch'i** [vital life energy] should be excited,
The **shen** [spirit of vitality] should be internally gathered.

The postures should be without defect,
without hollows or projections from the proper alignment;
in motion the Form should be continuous, without stops and starts.

The chin [intrinsic strength] should be
rooted in the feet,
generated from the legs,
controlled by the waist, and
manifested through the fingers.

The feet, legs, and waist should act together
as an integrated whole,
so that while advancing or withdrawing
one can grasp the opportunity of favorable timing
and advantageous position.

If correct timing and position are not achieved,
the body will become disordered
and will not move as an integrated whole;
the correction for this defect
must be sought in the legs and waist.

The principle of adjusting the legs and waist
applies for moving in all directions;
upward or downward,
advancing or withdrawing,
left or right.

All movements are motivated by I [mind-intention],
not external form.

If there is up, there is down;
when advancing, have regard for withdrawing;
when striking left, pay attention to the right.

If the I wants to move upward,
it must simultaneously have intent downward.

Alternating the force of pulling and pushing
severs an opponent's root
so that he can be defeated
quickly and certainly.

Insubstantial and substantial
should be clearly differentiated.
At any place where there is insubstantiality,
there must be substantiality;
Every place has both insubstantiality and substantiality.

The whole body should be threaded together
through every joint
without the slightest break.

Chang Ch'uan [Long Boxing] is like a great river
rolling on unceasingly.

Peng, Lu, Chi, An,
Ts'ai, Lieh, Chou, and K'ao
are equated to the Eight Trigrams.
The first four are the cardinal directions;
Ch'ien [South; Heaven],
K'un [North; Earth],

K'an [West; Water], and

Li [East; Fire].

The second four are the four corners:

Sun [Southwest; Wind],

Chen [Northeast; Thunder],

Tui [Southeast; Lake], and

Ken [Northwest; Mountain].

Advance (**Chin**), Withdraw (**T'ui**),

Look Left (**Tso Ku**), Look Right (**Yu Pan**), and

Central Equilibrium (**Chung Ting**)

are equated to the five elements:

Metal,

Wood,

Water,

Fire, and

Earth

All together these are termed the Thirteen Postures

A footnote appended to this Classic by **Yang Lu-ch'an** (1799-1872) reads:

This treatise was left by the patriarch **Chan San-feng** of Wu Tang Mountain, with a desire toward helping able people everywhere achieve longevity, and not merely as a means to martial skill.

THE TREATISE ON T'AI CHI CH'UAN

Attributed to Wang Tsung-yueh [Wang Zongyue] (18th Century)

as researched by Lee N. Scheele

T'ai Chi [Supreme Ultimate] comes from *Wu Chi* [Formless Void]
and is the mother of *yin* and *yang*.

In motion *T'ai Chi* separates;
in stillness *yin* and *yang* fuse and return to *Wu Chi*.

It is not excessive or deficient;
it follows a bending, adheres to an extension.

When the opponent is hard and I am soft,
it is called *tsou* [yielding].

When I follow the opponent and he becomes backed up,
it is called *nian* [sticking].

If the opponent's movement is quick,
then quickly respond;
if his movement is slow,
then follow slowly.

Although there are innumerable variations,
the principles that pervades them remain the same.

From familiarity with the correct touch,
one gradually comprehends *chin* [intrinsic strength];
from the comprehension of *chin* one can reach wisdom.

Without long practice
one cannot suddenly understand *T'ai Chi*.

Effortlessly the *chin* reaches the headtop.

Let the *ch'i* [vital life energy] sink to the *tan-t'ien* [field of elixir].

Don't lean in any direction;
suddenly appear,
suddenly disappear.

Empty the left wherever a pressure appears,
and similarly the right.

If the opponent raises up, I seem taller;
if he sinks down, then I seem lower;
advancing, he finds the distance seems incredibly long;
retreating, the distance seems exasperatingly short.

A feather cannot be placed,
and a fly cannot alight
on any part of the body.

The opponent does not know me;
I alone know him.

To become a peerless boxer results from this.

There are many boxing arts.

Although they use different forms,
for the most part they don't go beyond
the strong dominating the weak,
and the slow resigning to the swift.

The strong defeating the weak
and the slow hands ceding to the swift hands
are all the results of natural abilities
and not of well-trained techniques.

From the sentence "A force of four ounces deflects a thousand pounds"
we know that the technique is not accomplished with strength.

The spectacle of an old person defeating a group of young people,
how can it be due to swiftness?

Stand like a perfectly balanced scale and
move like a turning wheel.

Sinking to one side allows movement to flow;
being double-weighted is sluggish.

Anyone who has spent years of practice and still cannot neutralize,
and is always controlled by his opponent,
has not apprehended the fault of double-weightedness.

To avoid this fault one must distinguish *yin* from *yang*.

To adhere means to yield.
To yield means to adhere.

Within *yin* there is *yang*.
Within *yang* there is *yin*.

Yin and *yang* mutually aid and change each other.

Understanding this you can say you understand *chin*.
After you understand *chin*,
the more you practice,
the more skill.

Silently treasure knowledge and turn it over in the mind.
Gradually you can do as you like.

Fundamentally, it is giving up yourself to follow others.
Most people mistakenly give up the near to seek the far.
It is said, "Missing it by a little will lead many miles astray."

The practitioner must carefully study.

This is the Treatise

EXPOSITIONS OF INSIGHTS INTO THE PRACTICE OF THE THIRTEEN POSTURES

by Wu Yu-hsiang (Wu Yuxian) (1812 - 1880)
sometimes attributed to Wang Chung-yueh
as researched by Lee N. Scheele

The *hsin* [mind-and-heart] mobilizes the *ch'i* [vital life energy].

Make the *ch'i* sink calmly;
then the *ch'i* gathers and permeates the bones.

The *ch'i* mobilizes the body.
Make it move smoothly, so that it may easily follow the *hsin*.

The *I* [mind-intention] and *ch'i* must interchange agilely,
then there is an excellence of roundness and smoothness.
This is called "the interplay of insubstantial and substantial."

The *hsin* is the commander, the *ch'i* the flag, and the waist the banner.

The waist is like the axle and the *ch'i* is like the wheel.

The *ch'i* is always nurtured without harm.

Let the *ch'i* move as in a pearl with nine passages
without breaks
so that there is no part it cannot reach.

In moving the *ch'i* sticks to the back and permeates the spine.

It is said "First in the *hsin*, then in the body."

The abdomen relaxes, then the *ch'i* sinks into the bones.

The *shen* [spirit of vitality] is relaxed and the body calm.

The *shen* is always in the *hsin*.

Being able to breathe properly leads to agility.

The softest will then become the strongest.

When the *ching shen* is raised,
there is no fault of stagnancy and heaviness.
This is called suspending the headtop.

Inwardly make the *shen* firm,
and outwardly exhibit calmness and peace.

Throughout the body, the *I* relies on the *shen*,
not on the *ch'i*.
If it relied on the *ch'i*, it would become stagnant.

If there is *ch'i*, there is no *li* [external strength].

If not focused on *ch'i*, there is pure steel.

The *chin* [intrinsic strength] is *sung* [relaxed], but not *sung*;
it is capable of great extension, but is not extended.

The *chin* is broken, but the *I* is not.

The *chin* is stored (having a surplus) by means of the curved.

The *chin** is released by the back,
and the steps follow the changes of the body.

The mobilization of the *chin* is like refining steel a hundred times over.
There is nothing hard it cannot destroy.

Store up the *chin* like drawing a bow.

Mobilize the *chin* like drawing silk from a cocoon.

Release the *chin* like releasing the arrow.

To *fa-chin* [discharge energy],
sink,
relax completely,
and aim in one direction!

In the curve seek the straight,
store,
then release.

Be still as a mountain,
move like a great river.

The upright body must be stable and comfortable
to be able to sustain an attack from any of the eight directions.

Walk like a cat.

Remember, when moving, there is no place that does not move.
When still, there is no place that is not still.

First seek extension, then contraction;
then it can be fine and subtle.

It is said if the opponent does not move, then I do not move.
At the opponent's slightest move, I move first."

To withdraw is then to release,
to release it is necessary to withdraw.

In discontinuity there is still continuity.

In advancing and returning there must be folding.

Going forward and back there must be changes.

The Form is like that of a falcon about to seize a rabbit,
and the *shen* is like that of a cat about to catch a rat.

* Scholars argue persuasively that the use of the word *li* that actually appears here in ancient documents is a mis-transcription and the passage should read *chin*.

SONG OF THE THIRTEEN POSTURES

by Unknown Author
as researched by Lee N. Scheele

The Thirteen Postures should not be taken lightly;
the source of the postures is in the waist.

Be mindful of the interchange between insubstantial and substantial;
The *ch'i* circulates throughout the body without hindrance.

Be still,
when touched by the opponent,
be tranquil and move in stillness;
changes caused by my opponent fill him with wonder.

Study the function of each posture carefully and with deliberation;
to achieve the goal is very easy.

Pay attention to the waist at all times;
completely relax the abdomen
and the *ch'i* rises up.

When the tailbone is centered and straight,
the *shen* [spirit of vitality] goes through to the headtop.

To make the whole body light and agile
suspend the headtop.

Carefully study.

Extension and contraction, opening and closing, should be natural.

To enter the door and be shown the way,
you must be orally taught.
Practice should be uninterrupted,
and technique achieved by self study.

Speaking of the body and its function, what is the standard?

The *I* [mind-intent] and *ch'i* are king,
and the bones and muscles are the court.

Think over carefully what the final purpose is:
to lengthen life and maintain youth.

The Song consists of 140 characters;
each character is true and the meaning is complete.

If you do not study in this manner,
then you will waste your time and sigh with regret.

SONGS OF THE EIGHT POSTURES

Attributed to T'an Meng-hsien
as researched by Lee N. Scheele

The Song of Peng

What is the meaning of *Peng* energy?
It is like the water supporting a moving boat.
First sink the *ch'i* to the *tan-t'ien*,
then hold the head as if suspended from above.
The entire body is filled with springlike energy,
opening and closing in a very quick moment.
Even if the opponent uses a thousand pounds of force,
he can be uprooted and made to float without difficulty.

The Song of Lu

What is the meaning of *Lu* energy?
Entice the opponent toward you by allowing him to advance,
lightly and nimbly follow his incoming force
without disconnecting and without resisting.
When his force reaches its farthest extent,
it will naturally become empty.
The opponent can then be let go or countered at will.
Maintain your central equilibrium
and your opponent cannot gain an advantage.

The Song of Chi

What is the meaning of *Chi* energy?
There are two aspects to its functional use:
The direct way is to go to meet the opponent
and attach gently in one movement.
The indirect way is to use the reaction force
like the rebound of a ball bouncing off a wall, or
a coin thrown on a drumhead,
bouncing off with a ringing sound.

The Song of An

What is the meaning of *An* energy?
When applied it is like flowing water.
The substantial is concealed in the insubstantial.
When the flow is swift it is difficult to resist.
Coming to a high place, it swells and fills the place up;
meeting a hollow it dives downward.
The waves rise and fall,
finding a hole they will surely surge in.

The Song of Ts'ai

What is the meaning of *Ts'ai* energy?
It is like the weight attached to the beam of a balance scale.
Give free play to the opponent's force
no matter how heavy or light,
you will know how heavy or light it is after weighing it.
To push or pull requires only four ounces,
one thousand pounds can also be balanced.
If you ask what the principle is,
the answer is the function of the lever.

The Song of Lieh

What is the meaning of *Lieh* energy?
It revolves like a spinning disc.
If something is thrown onto it,
it will immediately be cast more than ten feet away.
Have you not seen a whirlpool form in a swift flowing stream?
The waves roll in spiraling currents.
If a falling leaf drops into it,
it will suddenly sink from sight.

The Song of Chou

What is the meaning of *Chou* energy?
Its method relates to the Five Elements.
Yin and Yang are divided above and below.
Insubstantiality and substantiality must be clearly distinguished.
Joined in unbroken continuity,
the opponent cannot resist the posture.
Its explosive pounding is especially fearsome.
When one has mastered the six kinds of energy,
the applications become unlimited.

The Song of K'ao

What is the meaning of *K'ao* energy?
Its method is divided into the shoulder and back technique.
In Diagonal Flying Posture use shoulder,
but within the shoulder technique
there is also some use of the back.
Once you have the opportunity and can take advantage of the posture,
the technique explodes like pounding a pestle.
Carefully maintain your own center.
Those who lose it will have no achievement.

SONG OF PUSH HANDS

by Unknown Author
as researched by Lee N. Scheele

Be conscientious in *Peng, Lu, Chi, and An*.

Upper and lower coordinate,
and the opponent finds it difficult to penetrate.

Let the opponent attack with great force;
use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds.

Attract to emptiness and discharge;
Zhan, Lian, Nian, Sui,
no resisting no letting go.

FIVE CHARACTER SECRET

by Li I-yu

as researched by Lee N. Scheele

CALM

The *hsin* [mind-and-heart] should be calm. If the *hsin* is not calm, one cannot concentrate, and when the arm is raised, whether forward or back, left or right, it is completely without certain direction. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a calm mind. In beginning to move, you cannot control (it) by yourself. The entire mind must also experience and comprehend the movements of the opponent. Accordingly, when the movement bends, it then straightens, without disconnecting or resisting. Do not extend or retreat by yourself. If my opponent has *li* [external strength], I also have *li*, but my *li* is previous in exact anticipation of his. If the opponent does not have *li*, I am also without *li*, but my *I* [mind-intent] is still previous. It is necessary to be continually mindful; to whatever part of the body is touched the mind should go. You must discover the information by non-discrimination and non-resistance. Follow this method, and in one year, or a half-year, you will instinctively find it in your body. All of this means you use *I*, not *chin* [intrinsic force]. After practicing for a long time, the opponent will be controlled by me and I will not be controlled by him.

AGILITY

If the body is clumsy, then in advancing or retreating it cannot be free; therefore, it must be agile. Once you raise your arm, you cannot appear clumsy. The moment the force of my opponent touches my skin and hair, my mind is already penetrating his bones. When holding up the arms, the *ch'i* [vital life energy] is threaded together continuously. When the left side is heavy, it then empties, and the right side is already countering. When the right is heavy, it empties, and the left is already countering. The *ch'i* is like a wheel, and the whole body must mutually coordinate. If there is any uncoordinated place, the body becomes disordered and weak. The defect is to be found in the waist and legs. First the mind is used to order the body. Follow the opponent and not your own inclination. Later your body can follow your mind, and you can control yourself and still follow the opponent. When you only follow your own inclination, you are clumsy, but when you follow the opponent, then your hands can distinguish and weigh accurately the amount of his force, and measure the distance of his approach with no mistake. Advancing and retreating, everywhere the coordination is perfect. After studying for a long time, your technique will become skillful.

BREATH

To Gather the *Ch'i*

If the *ch'i* is dispersed, then it is not stored and is easy to scatter. Let the *ch'i* penetrate the spine and the inhalation and exhalation be smooth and unimpeded throughout the entire body. The inhalation closes and gathers, the exhalation opens and discharges. Because the inhalation can naturally raise and also uproot the opponent, the exhalation can naturally sink down and also *fa-chin* [discharge energy] him. This is by means of the *I*, not the *li* mobilizing the *ch'i*.

INTERNAL FORCE

The Complete *Chin*

The *chin* of the whole body, through practice, becomes one unit. Distinguish clearly between substantial and insubstantial. To *fa-chin* it is necessary to have root. The *chin* starts from the foot, is commanded by the waist, and manifested in the fingers, and discharged through the spine and back. One must completely raise the *shen*

[spirit of vitality] at the moment when the opponent's *chin* is about to manifest, but has not yet been released. My *chin* has then already met his, not late, not early. It is like using a leather (tinder) to start a fire, or like a fountain gushing forth. In going forward or stepping back, there is not even the slightest disorder. In the curve seek the straight, store, then discharge; then you are able to follow your hands and achieve a beautiful result. This is called borrowing force to strike the opponent or using four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds.

SPIRIT

***Shen* Concentrated**

Having the above four, then you can return to concentrated spirit: if the spirit is concentrated, then it is continuous and uninterrupted, and the practice of *ch'i* returns to the *shen* [spirit of vitality]. The manifestation of *ch'i* moves with agility. When the *shen* is concentrated, opening and closing occur appropriately, and the differentiation of substantial and insubstantial is clear. If the left is insubstantial, the right is substantial, and vice-versa. Insubstantial does not mean completely without strength. The manifestation of *ch'i* must be agile. Substantial does not mean completely limited. The spirit must be completely concentrated. It is important to be completely in the mind [I] and the waist, and not outside. Not being outside or separated, force is borrowed from the opponent, and the *ch'i* is released from the spine. How can the *ch'i* discharge from the spine? It sinks downward from the two shoulders, gathers to the spine, and pours to the waist. This is *ch'i* from up to down and is called closed. From the waist the *ch'i* mobilizes to the spine, spreads to the two arms and flows to the fingers. This is *ch'i* from down to up and is called opened. Closed is gathering, and opened is discharging. When you know opening and closing, then you know *yin* and *yang*. Reaching this level your skill will progress with the days and you can do as you wish.

ESSENTIALS OF THE PRACTICE OF THE FORM AND PUSH-HANDS

by Li I-yu

as researched by Lee N. Scheele

Formerly people said: "being able to attract to emptiness, you can use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds." Not being able to attract to emptiness, you cannot deflect a thousand pounds. The words are simple, but the meaning is complete. The beginner cannot understand it. Here I add some words to explain it. If someone is ambitious to learn this art, he can find some way to enter it and every day he will have some improvement.

Desiring to attract to emptiness and deflect a thousand pounds, first you must know yourself and others. If you want to know yourself and others, you must give up yourself and follow others. If you give up yourself and follow others, first you must have the correct timing and position. To obtain the correct timing and position, you must first make your body one unit. Desiring to make the body one unit, you must first eliminate hollows and protuberances. To make the whole body without breaks or holes, you must first have the *shen* [spirit of vitality] and *ch'i* [vital life energy] excited and expanded. If you want the *shen* and *ch'i* activated and expanded, you must first raise the spirit (pay attention) and the *shen* should not be unfocussed. To have your *shen* not unfocussed, you must first have the *shen* and *ch'i* gather and penetrate the bones. Desiring the *shen* and *ch'i* to penetrate the bones, first you must strengthen the two thighs and loosen the two shoulders and let the *ch'i* sink down.

The *chin* [intrinsic strength] raises from the feet, changes in the legs, is stored in the chest, moved in the shoulders and commanded in the waist. The upper part connects to the two arms and the lower part follows the legs. It changes inside. To gather is to close and to release is to open. If it is quiet, it is completely still. Still means to close. In closing there is opening. If it is moving, everything moves. Moving is open. In opening there is closing. When the body is touched it revolves freely. There is nowhere that does not obtain power. Then you can attract to emptiness and use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds.

Practicing the Form every day is the *kung fu* of knowing yourself. When you start to practice, first ask yourself, "Did my whole body follow the above principles or not?" If one little place did not follow them, then correct it immediately. Therefore, in practicing the Form we want slowness not speed.

Push hands is the *kung fu* of knowing others. As for movement and stillness, although it is to know others, you must still ask yourself. If you arrange yourself well, when others touch you, you don't move a hair. Follow the opportunity and meet his *chin* and let him fall naturally outward. If you feel someplace in your body is powerless, it is double-weighted and unchanging. You must seek the defect in *yin* and *yang*, opening and closing. Know yourself and know others: in one hundred battles you will win one hundred times.

YANG'S TEN IMPORTANT POINTS

by Yang Cheng-fu (1883 - 1936)

as researched by Lee N. Scheele

1.) Head upright to let the *shen* [spirit of vitality] rise to the top of the head. Don't use *li* [external strength], or the neck will be stiff and the *ch'i* [vital life energy] and blood cannot flow through. It is necessary to have a natural and lively feeling. If the spirit cannot reach the headtop, it cannot raise.

2.) Sink the chest and pluck up the back. The chest is depressed naturally inward so that the *ch'i* can sink to the *tan-t'ien* [field of elixir]. Don't expand the chest: the *ch'i* gets stuck there and the body becomes top-heavy. The heel will be too light and can be uprooted. Pluck up the back and the *ch'i* sticks to the back; depress the chest and you can pluck up the back. Then you can discharge force through the spine. You will be a peerless boxer.

3.) *Sung* [Relax] the waist. The waist is the commander of the whole body. If you can *sung* the waist, then the two legs will have power and the lower part will be firm and stable. Substantial and insubstantial change, and this is based on the turning of the waist. It is said "the source of the postures lies in the waist. If you cannot get power, seek the defect in the legs and waist."

4.) Differentiate between insubstantial and substantial. This is the first principle in T'ai Chi Ch'uan. If the weight of the whole body is resting on the right leg, then the right leg is substantial and the left leg is insubstantial, and vice versa. When you can separate substantial and insubstantial, you can turn lightly without using strength. If you cannot separate, the step is heavy and slow. The stance is not firm and can be easily thrown of balance.

5.) Sink the shoulders and drop the elbows. The shoulders will be completely relaxed and open. If you cannot relax and sink, the two shoulders will be raised up and tense. The *ch'i* will follow them up and the whole body cannot get power. "Drop the elbows" means the elbows go down and relax. If the elbows raise, the shoulders are not able to sink and you cannot discharge people far. The discharge will then be close to the broken force of the external schools.

6.) Use the mind instead of force. The T'ai Chi Ch'uan *Classics* say, "all of this means use *I* [mind-intent] and not *li*." In practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan the whole body relaxes. Don't let one ounce of force remain in the blood vessels, bones, and ligaments to tie yourself up. Then you can be agile and able to change. You will be able to turn freely and easily. Doubting this, how can you increase your power?

The body has meridians like the ground has ditches and trenches. If not obstructed the water can flow. If the meridian is not closed, the *ch'i* goes through. If the whole body has hard force and it fills up the meridians, the *ch'i* and the blood stop and the turning is not smooth and agile. Just pull one hair and the whole body is off-balance. If you use *I*, and not *li*, then the *I* goes to a place in the body and the *ch'i* follows it. The *ch'i* and the blood circulate. If you do this every day and never stop, after a long time you will have *nei chin* [real internal strength]. The T'ai Chi Ch'uan *Classics* say, "when you are extremely soft, you become extremely hard and strong." Someone who has extremely good T'ai Chi Ch'uan *kung fu* has arms like iron wrapped with cotton and the weight is very heavy. As for the external schools, when they use *li*, they reveal *li*. When they don't use *li*, they are too light and floating. There *chin* is external and locked together. The *li* of the external schools is easily led and moved, and not too be esteemed.

7.) Coordinate the upper and lower parts of the body. The T'ai Chi Ch'uan *Classics* say "the motion should be rooted in the feet, released through the legs, controlled by the waist and manifested through the fingers." Everything acts simultaneously. When the hand, waist and foot move together, the eyes follow. If one part doesn't follow, the whole body is disordered.

8.) Harmonize the internal and external. In the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan the main thing is the *shen*. Therefore it is said "the spirit is the commander and the body is subordinate." If you can raise the spirit, then the movements will naturally be agile. The postures are not beyond insubstantial and substantial, opening and closing. That which is called open means not only the hands and feet are open, but the mind is also open. That which is called closed means not only the hands and feet are closed, but the mind is also closed. When you can make the inside and outside become one, then it becomes complete.

9.) Move with continuity. As to the external schools, their *chin* is the Latter Heaven brute *chin*. Therefore it is finite. There are connections and breaks. During the breaks the old force is exhausted and the new force has not yet been born. At these moments it is very easy for others to take advantage. T'ai Chi Ch'uan uses *I* and not *li*. From beginning to end it is continuous and not broken. It is circular and again resumes. It revolves and has no limits. The original *Classics* say it is "like a great river rolling on unceasingly." and that the circulation of the *chin* is "drawing silk from a cocoon " They all talk about being connected together.

10.) Move with tranquility [Seek stillness in movement]. The external schools assume jumping about is good and they use all their energy. That is why after practice everyone pants. T'ai Chi Ch'uan uses stillness to control movement. Although one moves, there is also stillness. Therefore in practicing the form, slower is better. If it is slow, the inhalation and exhalation are long and deep and the *ch'i* sinks to the *tan-t'ien*. Naturally there is no injurious practice such as engorgement of the blood vessels. The learner should be careful to comprehend it. Then you will get the real meaning.

ORIGIN OF TAI CHI

Naturally there are numerous myths on the origins of Tai Chi, but the "founder" seems to be a certain *Chang San-feng*, born around midnight April 9 in the year 1247. He began studying classical Chinese literature at the age of twelve. Due to his brilliant memory and vigilance, he was later employed as a government official. He learned to meditate, and after the death of his parents, he withdrew from his official duties, and returned to his home town. He studied in different ways the Buddhist martial art *Shao-Lin*, developed by the Buddhist monk *Da-Mo* to train weak monks. Shao-Lin was developed on the basis of *Yin-Gin Ching* (in the west perhaps better known as "The Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic") and *Hsi-Swi Ching* ("Marrow Cleaning Classic").

There are numerous stories on how Chang San-Feng developed Shao-Lin into Tai Chi Chuan. That he created it in his dreams at night cannot be verified. However, the French mathematician *Pascal* created, at the age of 16, an epoch-making geometrical theory in a dream he had after having puzzled with the problem all day. Chang San-Feng might - with his solid foundation in Shao-Lin training - have used the unconscious to create Tai Chi Chuan.

According to another story - which of course does not exclude the first theory - Chang San-Feng was living in the *Wu Tang*-mountains, where he one day was called to the door by an unusual sound. It was birds sitting in the trees, making a racket towards the earth, where a snake was lying with its head lifted, gazing up at the birds. A moment later, one of the birds spread its wings, and flew down to attack the snake. The snake moved a bit, yielding to the attack, but kept its usual circular shape. The fight continued like this for several minutes, up and down, back and forth - until Chang San-Feng stepped out of the door. Immediately the birds flew away and the snake disappeared. Thus the truth about the superiority in the yielding qualities of softness was revealed to Chang San-Feng, and he was able to create Tai Chi Chuan.

Until today, the inner core of every Tai Chi-style still builds on the profound principle of the yielding softness on the outside, and the strength and power and will on the inside. The purpose of Tai Chi Chuan is to cultivate, transform *Qi* - or interior energy - to *Shen* - or Spirit - in the human being. To use inner strength and energy, also for martial purposes.

Of course there are lots of stories on the remarkable abilities of Chang San-Feng. Many of the stories might seem somewhat exaggerated. However, if you have met someone, however, who just to some degree has demonstrated the extraordinary abilities Tai Chi Chuan can develop - naturally you have another point of view. In any case serious students can use the stories about Chang San-Feng to create individual goals. This way the stories become worthwhile and instructional - and remind you, that practise makes perfect.

When the winter was really cold and the track outside the temple, where he practiced was covered with snow, Chang liked to go out and enjoy the snow-covered landscape. Where he had walked there were no footsteps - like no one had walked there. This phenomenon even has its own term in Chinese, and it describes a very energetic, refined and mindful state for a human being to have obtained. Through his inner force he was also able to melt the snow, when he passed it. The heat from his body could be so intense, that the path behind him would appear under the melted snow, as if it was warm and sunny. It's also said, that when he was meditating at night, his cultivated energy - the so-called *Qi* or *Jing* - would make his coat flap, and the walls around him would shake. This phenomenon indicates, that his energy had reached its peak. He had obtained the state where his *Qi* had been transformed into *Shen* or Spirit.



Figure 1: Chang San-Feng

MEDICAL BENEFITS OF TAI CHI POSTURES

Tai Chi Chuan heals the body by sending inner energy (Qi) through energy lines (meridians) in the body. The choreography of each posture moves Qi to the a specific inner organ. Some organs are considered extra important to tonify, thus some of the postures are repeated.

Tai Chi is known to be effective towards many problems, e.g. circulatory disorders. With daily training it's also effective against back disorders. Research on hospitals in China has shown, that Tai Chi has a beneficial effect on patients undergoing regeneration after a sickbed of longer duration. The high blood pressure of these patients drops, just as the lung and heart functions are considerably improved.

The figures below give an impression of the effect of each single posture. You can also train one specific posture if you wish to train e.g. the heart.

Grasp Sparrows Tail - Strengthens the small and large intestine. Good by constipation.



Single Whip - Performed in flow it opens and strengthens the joints, just as it's good against rheumatism. Performed as a standing it strengthens the digestive organs.



The White Crane Spreads Its Wings - Strengthens the central nervous system and the spine.



Play Guitar - Performed as a standing it's good against digestive problems.



Embrache The Tiger And Return To Mountain - Supports the digestive functions and rejuvenates the inner organs generally.



Repulse Monkey - Strengthens the spine and gall bladder.



Needle At Sea Bottom - Strengthens the liver as the life force in the back and in the sexual organs. Treats premature ejaculation in men and sexual problems in women.



Turn And Chop - For the reduction of fat.



High Pat On Horse - Strengthens the spleen.



Turn And Kick With Left Heel - Strengthens the kidneys and stomach by acting on these two meridians.



Kick With Right Heel - Strengthens the kidneys and stomach by acting on these two meridians.



Part Horses Mane - Strengthens lungs and spleen.



Snake Creeps Down - Strengthens kidneys and the general condition of the body.



Hit Seven Stars - Promotes blood circulation.



Shoot Tiger With Bow - Good for the lungs.



Close Hands - Performed in flow it strengthens the central nervous system, "awakens" the brain. It also expands the back and chest. Performed as a standing it strengthens the liver, the spine is kept elastic and a youthful posture is promoted.



Brush Knee And Push - Strengthens the heart.



Step Forward And Punch - The following sequence strengthens the glands: move from *Brush Knee And Push* into *Step Forward And Punch* and keep the posture for three minutes.



Fist Under Elbow - Repeat this posture many times to obtain weight loss.



Slant Flying - Strengthens the lungs and small intestine.



Fan Through The Back - Strengthens the large intestine.



Wave Hands Like Clouds - Strengthens the whole stomach area, including spleen and pancreas.



Kick To The Right (and Left) - Treats too much Yang in the body - that is red-cheeked face, too much body heat etc. Also reduces weight.



Punch Low - Strengthens the legs and the adroitness of the body.



Hit The Tiger - Helps the back, kidneys etc.



Four Corners - Strengthens the whole chest area. Also good for cramps. Shown here only the first of all four corners.



Golden Cock Stands On One Leg - Good by stomach problems.



Brush The Lotus - Good by Yin weakness, i.e. one who appears introvert, sick, small, pale, slow-witted. Activates the Yang energy.



