



Stepping up top 108

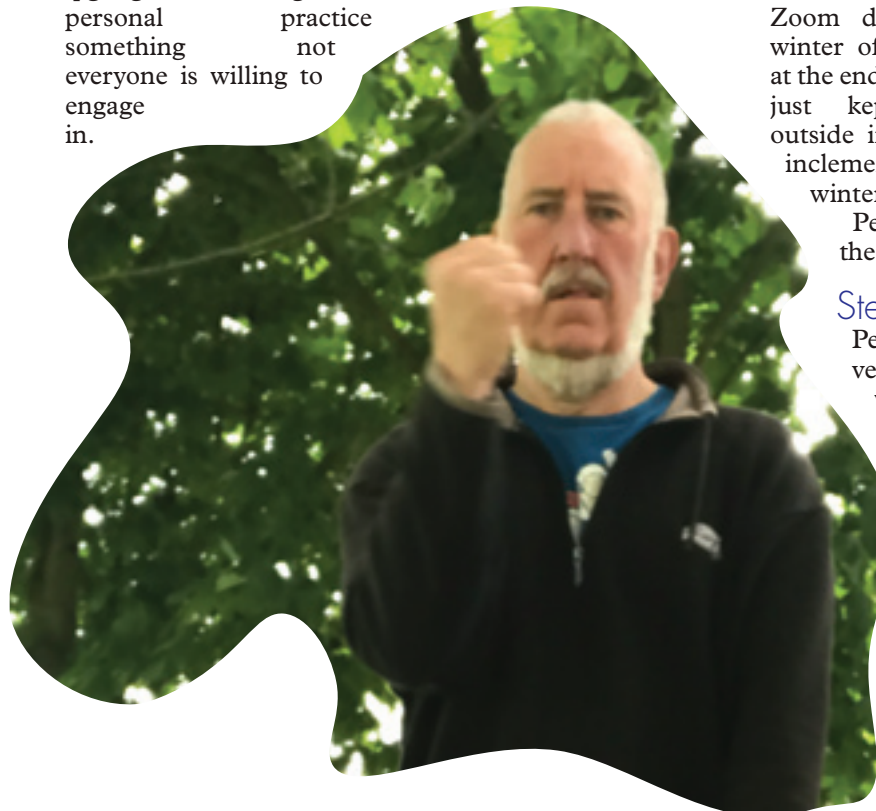
by Peter Karran

Peter Karran started to learn tai chi in September 1999. He was taught by Christina Bunney who, at the time, was part of the Leeds Yang long form crew.

He has practised Yang long form pretty much every day since then. His routine includes warm up exercises then what he calls a 'qigong sandwich' with a Yang filling: qigong, Yang form parts one and two, qigong, then part three of the form and qigong to finish

11 I first taught the Yang long form when I was working at Hanslope Park during 2017/18. About a dozen people tried but only a couple saw it through to the end. I began teaching tai chi to the local U3a in 2017. I started with a couple of one hour sessions a month. The teaching majored on the Yang long form with some qigong exercises. We seemed to spend ages (years) working through part one, we only got through about 20% of the steps. I used the standing on one leg warmup exercises, which put some people off. Those whose balance wasn't particularly good that day went back to steady steps.

I went to Tai Chi Caledonia in 2018 and completed the tai chi for rehabilitation course with Mark Peters. It became apparent to me that people preferred to do more qigong over the long form which tends to involve a lot of personal practice something not everyone is willing to engage in.



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On 20th March 2020 it was clear that the lockdown was going to be announced, so I cancelled the class and used the opportunity to try out video conferencing as a way to teach. During lockdown I ran classes most weekdays using Skype. These I recorded and published on YouTube. I also ran a weekly class for seated tai chi. There weren't many of us but it was clearly helping people to feel less isolated. Hence the title: 'Isolation should not mean isolated'. Towards the end of these virtual encounters I'd moved to an eight brocades qigong and tai chi steps. We went outside, initially under the rule of six, and tai chi in the park was born. We maintained social distancing until it was removed.

Over time I've come to running two half hour sessions a week. The structure is basically 10 minutes of the Yang 24

step form and 20 minutes of using an eight brocade set format. I use about 20 moves as the verses and step one beginning as the chorus. It seemed to me that the Yang long form was a bit like farmite – it might have a bit too much umami for most people. We went back to using Zoom during the winter of 2020/21, at the end of '21, we just kept going outside in the park. I only called off one class due to inclement weather. Perhaps this is a precursor for next winter's fuel price rises.

People make a voluntary contribution to tai chi in the park via Just Giving.

Step up required

People have taken to the 24 step Yang short form very well and we are starting to get to the stage where some pupils can lead the group through it.

People started to ask if we might learn the Yang long form so I decided to run a workshop in the park.

I made a video of 24 step form in 2020 so people have something to refer to outside of class. Naturally I have done the same for the long form.

First of all I analysed the similarities and differences between the two forms. The 24 step has some interesting nuances. I'll admit it: I learned the 24 step sequence from a video.

There are three things that require some effort to master:

1/. Turning the opposite way from the beginning in step one into step two

2/. Left grasping the sparrow's tail doesn't appear in the long form – step seven

3/. Right snake creeps down doesn't appear in the long form – step 17

Perhaps the prime numbers are auspicious.

The units (steps) are not the same in 108 as in 24 step.

Recalibrating the short form to use an equivalent long form step count method turns it into the 36 step Yang form. Similarly the long form could be considered as equivalent to an 89 step Yang form. So straightaway we can see there is a lot less to learn. If you know the short form then that is about one third of the long form.

Unlike the long form there is only one step repetition in short form. I would argue that steps nine and 11 single whip are different because nine is a double whip.

There are numerous step repetitions in the long form. Perhaps you can work those out for yourself.

There are about 18 steps that are unique to the long form. Many of them are repeated, they are listed in the lesson plan below. I taught these in the order in which they first appear in the long form sequence.



Peter Karran

Conclusion

It's a much smaller step than most people think to move up from the short to the long form. There is only about 50% more to learn. So it is possible to make the first step-up in one three hour workshop.

Implementation – my lesson plan

10:00 Expectations and warm up

Just to make sure we are all in the right place someone else took the warm-up (qigong) so I could concentrate on the form form.

●10:10 Part 1

We did the first part and discussed what was new and different. In addition to the new step there is a turn to the right and a fist to be made in transition to step 14. Easy-peasy.

●10:15 Step up to raise hands

Perhaps the most innocuous sounding yet one of the more vicious moves.

●10:25 Part 1

So we know we are mostly consciously competent with part 1 of the Yang long form. Now we can move on without feeling stuck.

●10:30 Part 2

Feeling consciously incompetent because there are a lot of new steps. However some of this is variation on things that we already know from the long form and qigong. Diagonal flying is basically the same as bring me sunshine.

●10:40 Embrace the tiger and return to mountain. So many words for such a simple thing.

●10:45 Fist under elbow

The oblique angled turn is one of the most difficult to complete in the form. I think it is important to hold a circle prior to observing fist under elbow. The phrase 'holding a circle' is an important short

hand that seems to be missing from many texts and videos. Perhaps another point of contention; what do you think?

●10:50 Oblique/diagonal flying

Another oblique angled turn; and step onto tip toe. If the wind is in the right direction you might actually take off.

●10:55 Turn body and chop with fist and twist deflect step parry punch

You might like to refer to *My own version of 108 step* from five minutes into the video.

So here is my biggest learning about the yang long form from the whole exercise. I have tended to use a watered down version of chop with fist prior to all punches: it is

very similar to step 14 as described by Fu Zhongwen. I saw it as the twist deflect part of the punch sequence; having overlooked the chop with fist step. I spent a lot of time

researching various YouTube videos. I have found Kevin's video based on Mr Moy's teaching very useful; although I don't follow the

'overreach' style in my practice. I found the two other videos, on chop with fist and snake spits, helped to crystallise my thinking. I have included a burst

sequence in the article so you can see

where I have come into land on this. Also I revisited the 24 step video which includes chop with fist. My view is that it should not be there because I don't think it fits with apparent close up.

Fu Zhongwen talks at length about clearing the arm and turning fist into palm in apparent close up. Gerda Geddes uses an alternative method for clearing the arm in steps 32, 91 and 98 (plus a third alternative in step 46 which I refer to as dragon's prey – see below), which I have not seen defined elsewhere.

The whole of this combination is possibly another point of contention.

●11:00

Parting/separation

kick (right) and parting/separation kick (left)

If you can right and left kick then these are just easier; remember the objective is more like a trip.

●11:05 Step up punch down; turn body and chop with fist; and twist deflect step parry and punch (dragon's prey)

Referring to my own version of 108 step from seven minutes 50 seconds into the video, the thing that is new here is in the transition from this step to the next (see chop with fist earlier); the repost to a counter-attack. I am still experimenting with this. I think it will stay basically the same with some small tweaks.

●11:10 Break

There is time for a cup of coffee and a piece of cake and a quick comfort break.

●11:30 Hit/strike tiger (left) and hit/strike tiger (right) also known as twisting the tigers ears.

Some more punching.

●11:35 Spin and kick with right heel

The kicks are free.



●11:40 Part 2

So we know we are transitioning from consciously incompetent to competent with part 2 of the Yang long form. It doesn't quite flow yet.

●11:50 Part 3

In danger of falling off the edge of the learning zone. We've come this far so let's carry on.

●11:55 Turn body and white snake spits out tongue and twist deflect step parry punch (parry and punch)

Basically chop with fist with a palm instead.

●12:00 Cross palm or palm thrust

First get your palm tree then thrust it... it's amazing where a high pat can take you.

●12:05 Step forward and punch groin

Same old punch sequence with a shift in the direction of travel.

●12:10 Step up to form the seven stars

Make fists and cross your wrists.

●12:15 Sit/step back to ride the tiger

It feels like the tiger is chasing its tail.

●11:20 Turn body and swing over lotus

I have never understood why there is a fast step in the Yang form so I do it in the same metre as the rest. This means only the right leg moves quickly to catch up with the arms. I don't smack my foot because I can't and if I did then it would have severe consequences for my arthritic back. So I gently tap my thigh on the basis that if someone's head happened to be in between hand and leg then that would be sufficient. Fortunately I managed to capture a burst of this step with the camera.

●12:25 Draw the bow to shoot the tiger

Basically fan through the back with a fist flourish and finally the tiger gets it.

●12:30 Part three

Still teetering on the edge of the learning zone, so many things to remember.

●12:35 The whole form

Weirdly everything came together and it just flowed from step one through to step 108. I was calling the steps out in advance, which is what I do with the

short form. I have tried not calling them out but it feels like a high wire act without a safety net.

●12:55 Benefits, concerns and next steps

●13:00 End

Lessons learned

It is important to properly prepare: there is more than 20 years preparation here.

Gerda Geddes is not quite as flowery as some people think; there is still something to be learned from her.

There is much to be learned from teaching something and approaching it differently.

The tiger gets it in the long form.

Maybe I should ask people to take it in turns to call the steps. I know from Morris Dancing that calling makes me learn better.

The repetition of each part meant that the new steps were better integrated into the flow. Everyone that has commented said that by the final run of the complete form "it just flowed". So my initial work here is done: until the next time. ☯

References:

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- 24 Step History and Movements: 24-form tai chi chuan - Wikipedia
- 108 Step Movements plus my own nomenclature: Yang style Tai Chi 108 form
- 108 Step video: *Fu Zhongwen Yang-style form part one* - YouTube
- Understanding T'ai Chi Ch'uan* video: The Yang long form demonstrated by Gerda Geddes
- Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan*: Fu Zhongwen – Bing images
- T'ai-chi Touchstones: Yang Family Secret Transmissions*: Douglas Wile: 9780912059013: Books
- My own version of 108 step: www.youtu.be/z9I7OrRUTpk
- My own version of 24 step: www.youtu.be/xEr-VHhzv8w
- 108 Move Tai Chi Set Taught To Me By Mr. Moy Lin Shin: www.youtu.be/9FfjsckaymU
- Yang Family Tai Chi turn body chop with fist, transitions to parry block*: www.youtu.be/7p5YQyd4DOg
- Tai Chi 24 Section Application Exercise*: White Snake spits: www.youtu.be/Oym6ZY-b7FE

