

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI & QIGONG UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN

& INTERNAL ARTS

No.67 December 2022 | £5.00

Tai chi combat

Spirals in tai chi

From 24 to 108

Teaching children

Wudang style

Strictly tai chi

TAI CHI CALEDONIA



A week of
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This 26th event is our 24th year at Stirling University Campus which is set in a spectacular woodland, with lakes and acres of open green space which abound with wildlife. This fresh environment is perfectly suited for training.



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James - Intro to Lihuebafa Lucia - Moving from the Centre
Yanira - Moving Step Push Hands Pim - Meditative Walking
John - 4 Weapons - 4 Directions Paul - Martial Principles
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Qigong Training 0830-0930



Push Hands - every evening



Cally Ceilidh - Wednesday



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Contents

Comment page 4

From the board page 5

Tai chi spiral pages 7 – 10

Stepping up to 108 pages 11 – 14

Teaching in schools pages 16 – 17

Meet the board pages 18 – 20

Tai chi tango pages 21 – 24

The wudan lineage 26

Combat page 27 – 30

Push hands in Prague pages 32 – 33

Odds at the end page 34



Comment



It seems a long time ago that I started working on Tai Chi Chuan and Oriental Arts. Although a member of the union for a number of years I thought I had kept a low profile. I am still not sure how our chair, Mark Peters, discovered my day job and that it included a couple of online publications. Long story short, in August 2021, I suddenly found myself as editor but ably assisted by Suse Coon, herself an experienced journalist.

Over the past year a lot has changed. First of all Oriental in the magazine's title was felt to be inappropriate so was changed: Tai Chi Chuan and Internal Arts was born in January 2022 – published a little late to allow for tributes to Dan Docherty who had sadly passed away in December 2021.

The union now has around 1,000 members so it was a little disappointing that only 30 of us turned up at the Zoom members' meeting recently. But that is the way of clubs and members. It is not an unusual experience. The last tai chi union AGM that I attended saw, aside from the committee, only four members in attendance.

The union moves forward into 2023 with a slimmed down board. At the recent meeting the board reported though that the union's finances are now on an even keel with cash in the bank and a forecast to break even in 2023.

This is good news for members and for TCC&IA. Then after publishing the last five editions online we are back in print and will be for the foreseeable future. In addition the union will be offering funding for members to run classes for disadvantaged students. Details will follow.

Also our membership to CIMSPA, somewhat controversial in the beginning, is now fully set up. If you have any concerns about how it might affect your teaching there is a useful Q&A on pages 19-20.

And for those of a martial disposition we are continuing our series on tai chi in combat. One of my students is a boxer. He joined me to help his recovery from surgery earlier this year. Although he is now fit and back to work he hasn't trained much at his boxing gym. So I was rather pleased when he told me that, when he did have a session with his trainer recently, the guy told him: "It's amazing, you haven't been here for ages but you are punching harder than you ever did before." The tai chi? We like to think so.

John Roper

TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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Between the pages

Welcome to the first print edition of the new magazine! Many of you have enjoyed the digital version but we also know many were keen to have the printed format too. We hope you enjoy reading the articles and look forward to hearing your comments.

Working together, growing stronger

We have all been navigating our way through difficult times. We know the challenges of covid and now the cost-of-living crisis are particularly affecting many. At our meeting on 26th November, we shared some ideas on taking TCUGB forward including what support we can give you. We will put the minutes and slides of the meeting on the website but here is a short re-cap.

Where are we now?

TCUGB became a community interest company (CIC) in 2018. In simple terms, the TCUGB CIC looks to support two communities, our members and the public. Our members get the many benefits including this magazine. We support the public by providing non-style specific information, including where to learn.

Simplifying the membership

The technical panel, who assess the quality of practice and teaching experience, were finding that the long-established grading system was becoming divisive and not fit for purpose for today's union.

In response to feedback, they have massively simplified the grades to: instructor (minimum of five years training) and senior (minimum of ten years training). This better supports our developing membership. Full details will be available on the new website.

Encouraging new members to join

Ordinary membership has always been open to everyone interested in tai chi and the internal arts from the very experienced to beginners and the merely curious. Alongside simplifying the membership, we are looking to increase the number of ordinary members, and particularly students as they are the future of the arts; their input and experiences can benefit everyone.

Website updates

Led by Ben Morris and John Johnson, we are rebuilding the website. Sections had been added this year, including qigong, and newsletters, but this is a full redesign. It will be more customer focused and include improved class search facilities, resources, and eventually a members only secure area. As the project develops you will be kept informed via the e-newsletters.

A journal with a difference

As part of the board's efforts to cut expenses, we reviewed the magazine costs and found significant savings in production and printing. We are reintroducing the hard copy of the magazine from this issue, December 2022.

We will continue the digital version too, as many members like this option, plus we also plan to enhance it with additional articles for the public as part of our CIC commitment. John Roper and Suse Coon should get full credit for this new magazine.

CIMSPA

Working with CIMSPA is another key part of TCUGB's plans for 2023 and beyond.

Mark Peters leads and he has created the Q&A article included in this journal.

Financial support

Thanks to cost savings, fees can continue at the same price as they have for many years, while improving benefits. For example, we are introducing a fund for those working with the disadvantaged (more details will follow) and we have stopped

taking fees for insurance. Feedback on the new insurance provider has been excellent as the policies are clearer and offer great value.

What would you like from the union?

We continuously listen to your feedback. The TCUGB C.I.C. is owned by its members so we would like to hear from you about issues that are close to your hearts and how we can help you better achieve your goals.

Members have already said they would like TCUGB-led events and workshops. Areas suggested are: introduction to traditional Chinese medicine, anatomy & physiology; safeguarding, cross-style events etc. We hope to offer member-led sessions in 2023 and we need your help to do this.

We are looking for people with enthusiasm and time to come and work with us, to continue the TCUGB development through project working groups. Email us at enquiries@taichiunion.com

The only caveat is to remind you that all directors are volunteers with limited time so any projects will have to be considered in the light of existing plans, priorities and resources.

Finally, we want to thank our fantastic support team (Aileen and John); we all owe them a huge debt of gratitude for their hard work, goodwill and humour. Without them there would be no TCUGB.

Board of Directors

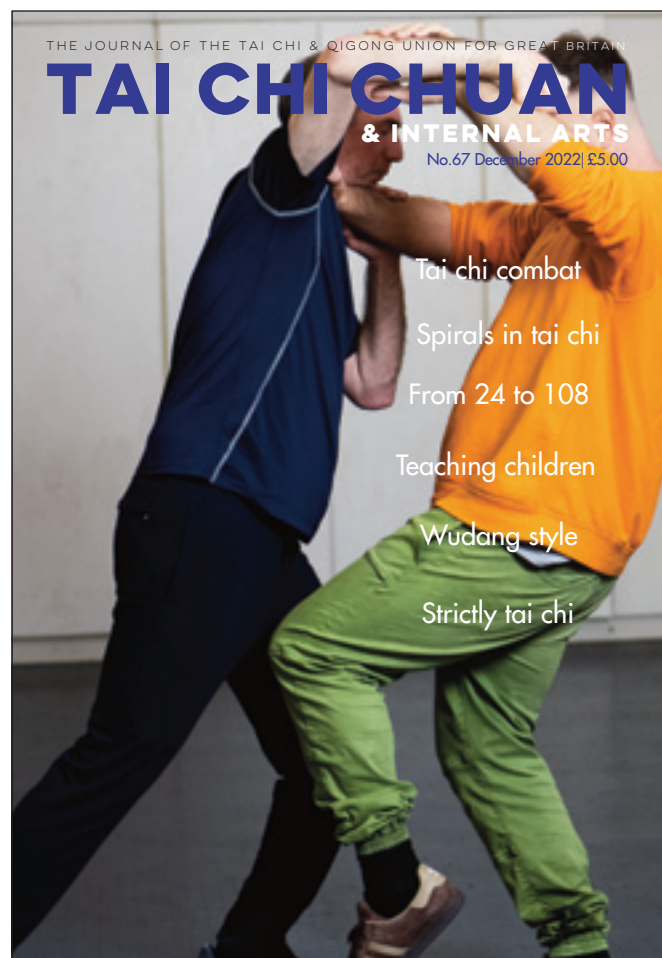
The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain CIC

Advertise in **TAI CHI CHUAN** & INTERNAL ARTS

It takes 1,000 to start for one to finish
so says the old Chinese proverb about tai chi chuan

Well, three times each year 1,000 members of TCU receive a copy of TCC&IA and every month around 1,000 people log onto the TCC&IA website to read the magazine online
So it looks like we are getting something right

Reach these tai chi and qigong practitioners, advertise your events, workshops and martial arts equipment in *your* magazine
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Spiralling in the art

G Hamilton

The seconds ticked by slowly. Too slowly. I counted them to take my mind off the fire in my arms. Ninety-nine...a hundred. One...two...three...Is he coming back yet? ...five...six...seven... I had lost count of how many times I had reached a hundred and started again at one. He's coming! Can I rest now? My teacher, Dr. Zhu Guang, studied my single-whip posture. The last time he had come over to me, he had simply placed a hand on my drooping crane's beak arm and moved it upwards and an inch further back, sending more fire shooting along it. Then the other arm – elbow further in, tiger mouth aligned properly – and then I was left to 'cook' a bit longer. Tai chi: the gentle art?

Some twenty minutes in, a nod finally gave me permission to lower my burning limbs. Relief flooding through me, I was already moving towards a nearby seat for my well-earned rest when he said: "Now, other side."

Diving deep while standing still

So that was how it went with the tai chi... and the bagua... and the xing yi: the three great arts practised by my teacher, and by his teachers, going back several generations to the roots of his lineages. These stationary postures, I discovered, were part of the traditional training methods that sear the correct alignments into every sinew of your body and make sure that you never forget them. Fortunately, despite much initial moaning and complaining, I had enough faith in my teacher to stick with it until the plethora of unhelpful habits I had developed

during years of previous practice began to be corrected and replaced by a growing awareness of the underlying power within my own body.

Over time, the body becomes used to these uncomfortable postures. In some ways, they are often self-correcting. If we are leaning awkwardly in any direction, the resulting discomfort will soon cause us to settle more deeply into our stances, drop the tailbone, suspend the crown-point and engage the dantien. We find that we have to let go and relax into the stance. The shoulders naturally become pressed down, the weight naturally sinks into the legs and the body begins to develop the kind of dynamic, springy resilience that is a defining quality of the Chinese internal martial arts.

As Professor Wang Zhizhong, one of my teacher's teachers, says in his book *Taijiquan: Die Tradition der 13*

7 *Grundformen*, “It is as if you are at the bottom of a lake, with the great weight of water pressing down on you all the time and squeezing you inwards. At the same time, the crown-point rises and the spine lengthens, allowing the waist to turn freely so that power from the lower dantien can be directed outwards and expressed through the extremities.”

Stationary postures allow us time to explore some of the deeper dimensions and, potentially, reach the highest levels instead of just doing-the-forms, getting our heads round the order of movements and adding to our collection of moves and tricks. We can swim miles and miles on the surface, and only rarely dive down into the depths of the art.

So what are these hidden depths? In the same book, professor Wang provided his own translation of the *Treatise of Chan Sang Feng*, which I then translated from the German with the help of my old friend Google Translate – I know, right? But anyway there was one sentence that I was fairly sure I had translated incorrectly. In the third paragraph of the treatise, where other translators had spoken about ‘connectedness’, the sentence Google came up with was: ‘The most important thing is through’. After much thought, and based on several decades of my own experience, I decided to keep this sentence. I also came to regard it as one of the most important statements I have ever come across in the tai chi classics.

Pearls, strings, springs and other things

The classics encourage us to think of a thread being passed through the ‘nine channelled pearl’, reminding us to keep all our joints flexible and open to let the energy (chi) flow through, led by the mind (yi), so that we can experience the string-of-pearls effect: each body part being connected to every other part rather than the various bits moving independently.

“Internal power does not require tension”

The key to real fluidity of movement is to forget the pearls and focus on the string that passes through them. We can feel the twisting, coiling and recoiling as the imaginary thread surges through the pearls of our various body parts and all the connective tissues between them, so that they connect naturally without effort. As a result, we become more aware of the fluid interplay of yin and yang in our forms. We can study pairs of opposites, such as hardness and softness, and perhaps a mysterious third thing that is greater than the sum of its parts. We begin to realise that yang does not mean stiffness or tension and yin does not mean weakness or being as floppy as a rag doll; that there is another quality at play, a kind of elastic resilience that is both relaxed and strong at the same time.

Torsion versus tension

Internal power does not require tension. Tension implies stiffness and contraction of muscles rather than the relaxed flexibility that is the essence of tai chi, bagua and xing yi. Properly inflated fitballs don't tense unless the rubber has perished. They are only useful if they still have some bounce in them and they can rotate freely about an axis: two vital ingredients in push hands practice, where our springy ward off and rotating waist allow us to bounce people away or redirect their incoming force. Torsion, on

the other hand, is a whole different ball game.

Imagine screwing a bradawl into a piece of wood. You could just bash it in or press it in as hard as you can but if you twist as you press, you're likely to get it further into the wood. The turning action is called torque and it helps to generate a lot of force.

When any material is twisted along its axis, it creates torsion. If you drive a car, you may know that the torque (rotational force) generated by the pistons turning the crankshaft of an engine creates torsion in the drive shaft. This is transmitted via the axle to the wheels. The same kind of thing goes on in the propeller shaft on a ship. If such internal forces are powerful enough to move battleships across oceans, it would seem wasteful not to put them to use in our martial arts.

In tai chi, xing yi and bagua, rotational torque arises from the turning of the waist in its continual figure of eight, or infinity loop, around the lower rib cage. This creates the torsion that turns the upper torso and is transmitted through the arms to be expressed by the fingers.

As we breathe out, the tail bone drops, the dantien rolls and the waist starts to turn and we feel the torsion this produces throughout the upper trunk, magnifying and directing the power generated from the dantien.

With our shoulders pressed down, the subsequent squeezing in of each upper arm gives rise to a spiral – a drilling action – all the way to the fingertips. We can feel how the lengthening and shortening of our arms can be one continuous process, a kind of elasticity or harmonic oscillation, like a spring stretching and recoiling as it turns, without any stopping and starting. When we strike, the recoil is equally important. Our springy elasticity enables the waist and arm to withdraw the hand immediately and smoothly, without becoming floppy or losing the structure, conserving energy until it is time for it to be expressed again. That way, a strike can be delivered swiftly, like a snake spitting poison, without giving the opponent an opportunity to grab the arm.

Using the waist does not involve the sort of twisting that you would get from turning your hips one way and your shoulders the other, like wringing out a wet towel, (which is not the best way to treat your liver, kidneys and spleen), and it does not involve the twisting of (and potential damage to) your knees and ankles. To use the waist fully and safely – for example in bagua postures, where the waist may be turned so that the upper chest and shoulders are at roughly a 90° angle to the hips – the legs and hips remain stable. If we are to avoid injuring the spine by over-twisting it is important to keep it vertical, drop the tailbone and sink the weight into the legs to allow space to open up between the vertebrae, and the waist to rotate more freely. Torsion injury to the spine tends to be caused by twisting while carrying something heavy, particularly if the spine is



Gaynel Hamilton

also leaning or out of proper alignment.

This is particularly relevant when we are performing a tai chi roll-back (liu), during which we need to be upright, stable, sunk and rooted and maintain our own centre of gravity so that the free turning of our waist can lead the opponent into emptiness, rather than giving us a bad back. The force we are using is a resultant vector from the combined effect of the body moving backwards a little, rotating at the waist and creating a downward pressure on the opponent's arm. When applying a roll-back, we should be able to pivot quite comfortably, with minimum effort, to disrupt and divide our opponent's incoming force and thereby 'use four ounces to move a thousand pounds' without any tugging, pulling or injuring ourselves in the process.

Torsion strength in bagua

In baguazhang, you are like a whirlwind, able to sweep up an opponent in your vortex and direct your strikes in various directions as eddies off the spiral. As you walk the circle, your whole body is twisted at the waist so that your chest is facing the centre while your legs follow the circumference. In all the 'eight mother palms', you can feel the torsion through your whole body and, by keeping your shoulders down and squeezing in your upper arms, this torsion carries all the way to your fingertips. The more you relax and settle into your stance, like sitting on a chair, the more you can experience this coiling strength.

Whether or not this is obvious to you depends on how you are practising. For example, in 'hold up the heavens', you can just lift up your arms in a relaxed way as if you are shrugging and saying: "search-me?", or you can use torsion strength from your waist so that the arms stretch and coil upwards and outwards from the dantien in a drilling action with a downward pressure on the shoulders and an inward twist of the upper arms and elbows as the hands turn palm upwards. The same is true of 'repulse monkeys' in tai chi.



In a double-palm strike, the more the shoulders and upper arms press down and squeeze in, the more powerful the forward blast of energy, and in push front and back, the shoulders stay down and the hands push along the circumference of the circle while the chest faces the centre, again producing that relaxed torsion all the way through the body. A common mistake is to face the direction you are walking in and just 'push to the front and behind' with 90° angles between the torso and limbs. By turning the upper body to face the centre, you get a smooth path through the body from one hand to the other, as if you are almost pressing sideways. You can feel that connectedness through the waist and dantien and generate whole body power through your limbs.

In 'dragon palm' or 'push mill', the upper arm spirals out and squeezes in so that the elbow is

in line with the shoulder and hand as the palm reaches towards the centre of the circle like a tiger's claw. Holding this as a stationary posture may feel very uncomfortable until all your muscles and connective tissues become accustomed to it but the power that this develops is phenomenal and well worth the initial suffering.

Torsion strength in xing yi

In xing yi quan, your powerful legs launch you forwards like a missile with barely any effort at all, but it is not all about the legs. The coiling is still there, like a head of steam, spiralling upwards and outwards from the dantien kettle. In 'pi chuan', for example, there is the drilling action of the pointed fist as it shoots upwards and forwards before opening and chopping forwards and downwards, perhaps to intercept and trap an opponent's arm as you step towards them and your other fist comes through to strike. The drilling action comes not from the fist but from the arm, which in turn is driven by torsion from the waist

and power from the dantien.

This drilling, corkscrewing feel to the arms and the distinct twisting of the waist are present in each of the 'five elements' and '12 animals'. There is an instant of yang at the moment of contact but it is not the same as hardness, stiffness or tension. It is alive and dynamic, yet this aliveness derives, paradoxically, from the long hours of training in stationary postures. For example, in the fundamental 'san ti' posture, as we were taught it, one shoulder is back so the upper body is sideways on to your attacker. Front knee and foot are in a straight line towards the attacker, the back thigh is squeezed in and energy from the dantien is projected all the way through to the fingertips. By standing for a long time in this position, your body will explode like lightning into the next one with the full force of the 180° turn as you step through and launch yourself forwards.

A difficulty with xing yi is that so many people appear to practise it with the whole trunk simply facing forwards and the arms held out directly in front, without any twisting at the waist or squeezing in of the outer thigh and arms or pressing down of the shoulders. Again, what's needed is torsion, not tension, all the way through the relaxed yet primed body. It acts like a high tensile steel cable that is strong and resilient yet fluid and responsive enough to adapt and change with the situation, so you keep your ting jin ('listening energy' or sensitivity and responsiveness) and are able to go with the flow.

In all the internal martial arts, tension and stiffening make you static and easy for your opponent to 'read' and possibly over-committed to a movement. "Be like water, my friend", as the great man said. Having said that, being like water does not mean being unstable. There is no rocking about or hip swaying: you are rooted to the ground, the dantien is engaged and the whole body is primed with peng jin so that you are able to express fajin if you choose to. If the hips become unstable, dantien power is lost, precision is impossible and the whole thing just becomes an empty exercise. The root and stability are the keys to the whole lot.

Torsion strength in tai chi

In tai chi, you have all of this and more. To discuss all the qualities, energies or jins involved in tai chi chuan would take several books so let's just focus for a moment on the twisting, coiling, drilling actions in our tai chi forms and applications, using just one Yang style version of white crane spreads wings as an example.

How you practise this movement is entirely your own choice. As the top arm rises it can simply be lifted gracefully into the air. In a real fight, however, it can coil around to strike the side of the opponent's head with the back of your hand like cracking a whip, or it can spiral upwards and outwards, powerfully intercepting and redirecting an opponent's arm as it does so, while the bottom hand takes the opponent's other arm downwards and outwards towards the opposite diagonal, creating a

disorientating splitting action. This works especially well if it is combined with a rotation at the waist, resulting in a three-dimensional movement which then allows

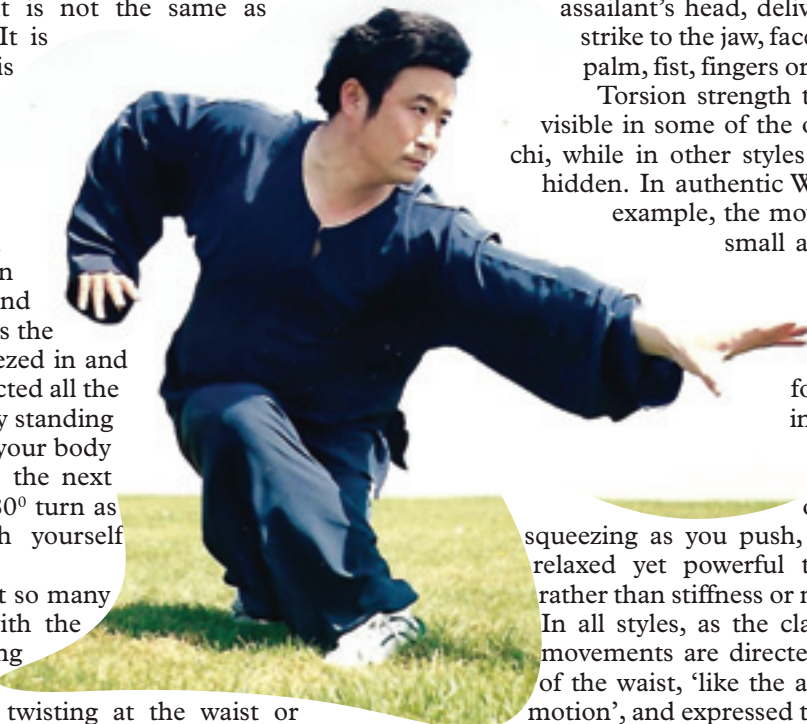
the top hand to spiral in towards the assailant's head, delivering a powerful strike to the jaw, face or neck with the palm, fist, fingers or side of the hand.

Torsion strength tends to be most visible in some of the older styles of tai chi, while in other styles it may be more hidden. In authentic Wu Hao style, for example, the movements are very small and compact, but

a considerable amount of energy can be produced by follow-stepping into the close personal space of the opponent and

squeezing as you push, again using this relaxed yet powerful twisting strength rather than stiffness or muscular tension. In all styles, as the classics tell us, the movements are directed by the turning of the waist, 'like the axle of a wheel in motion', and expressed through the arms, hands and fingers.

Once you know it is there, and you have experienced that awesome connectedness and power for yourself, this twisting, coiling torsional strength can be found wherever you look for it in your tai chi, xing yi or bagua. Knowing that the polar opposites of hard and soft are not the only choices available in our martial arts, we can relax yet be primed like an inflating balloon. We can stretch and withdraw, surge out and reel in, twist and coil as we sense, neutralise and redirect an opponent's incoming force and release our own power. Instead of hard blocks, we can parry, intercept, ward and drill in spirals as we stick, connect, redirect and issue. We can be firm and strong without being tense and stiff, or weak and floppy. Stable and rooted yet constantly changing, we can be as pliant and responsive as a willow tree in a breeze yet as alive and powerful as a python. We can wave hands in clouds like winding in a heavy cable, using power from the waist and dantien. We can strike like a power drill or a pressure hose. Being like water, with your mind as vast and still as an ocean as it rests in wuji, you can choose to be as soft as a ripple or as hard as ice but, in a fight, it is useful to remember that you always have within you the power of a tsunami. 🌊



Gaynel Hamilton, (known to her students as "G"), became interested in tai chi in 1970 and has been teaching it since 1986. Having had the privilege to train with some excellent teachers, notably Robert France and Dr. Zhu Guang, she has worked as an international competition judge and, with her husband, Colin, founded the Yiheyuan Martial Arts school in 1992. For three decades, they have dedicated themselves to developing and teaching the internal martial arts and have co-authored a wide range of home study materials, including *The 7 Steps Towards Mastery* series of books. In recognition of her work as a long-serving member of the executive committee, she was made an honorary president of the TCUGB.



Stepping up top 108

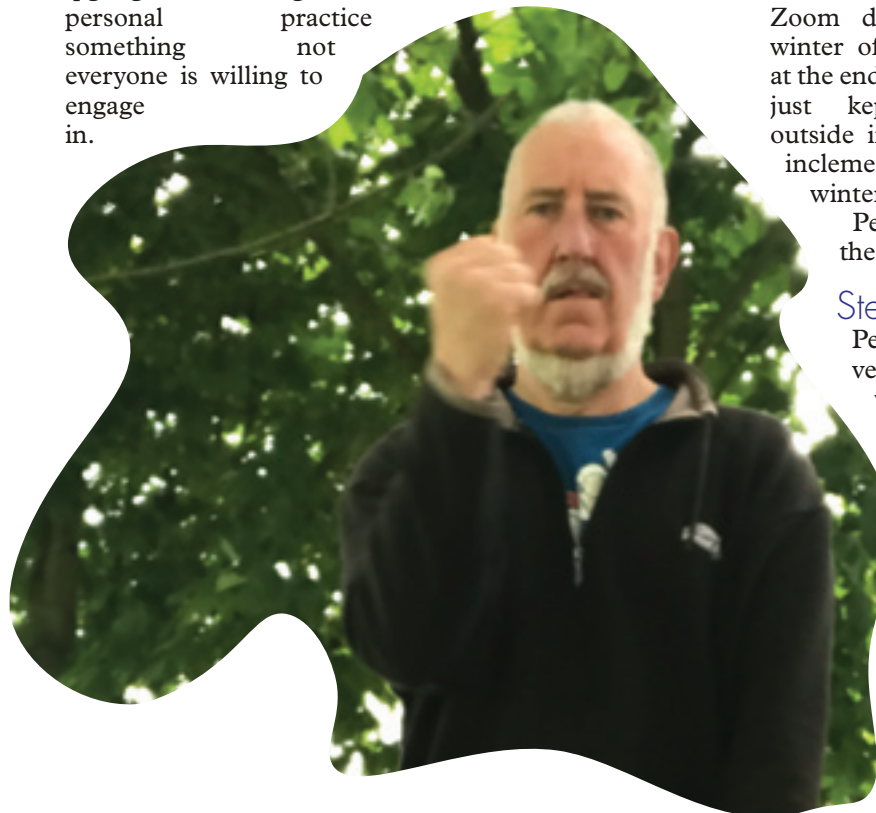
by Peter Karran

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.



“I know from Morris
Dancing that calling makes
me learn better

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. ☯

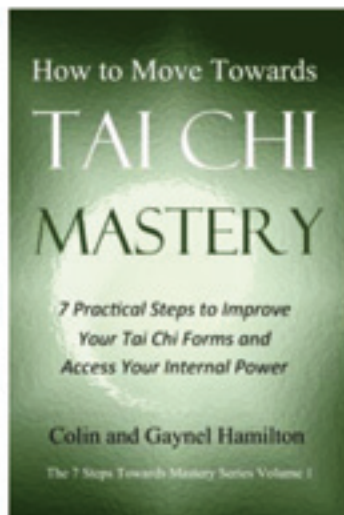
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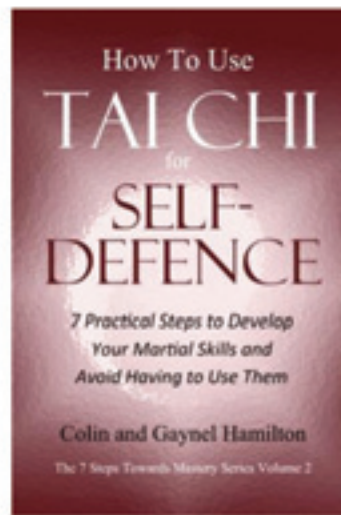


From Mystery to Mastery

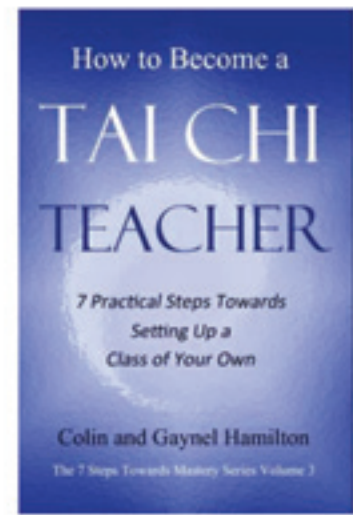
Advanced step-by step guides available from Amazon in Kindle and paperback



"Previous teachers just said reverse breathing without explanation. Have lowered my blood pressure 20 points since reading this book."
"Even after training in Tai Chi for nearly 20 years, this book showed me that there is always more to learn."
"Just brilliant; the authors pack a lifetime of key knowledge into less than 100 pages."



"I have in my collection over 100 books on Tai Chi. This book is by far the best in my collection...Explained in terms anyone can understand. It covers class style applications as well as those for tournament and most importantly street self defense...This book gets to the basic physics of why Tai Chi works if you practise and apply it correctly."



"Highly recommended to new teachers but it contains a fair bit of info for those who already teach and who may be needing some fresh ideas and inspiration."
"Sound, practical advice in a conversational and very readable style...the authors can be said to have contributed something truly valuable to the literature and art of taijiquan."



Master Zhu Guang demonstrates snake creeps down:
see page 7

Starting them young

Phil Wright started tai chi in 1987 with teachers from the John Kells and the Dr Chi Chiang lineage. In 2013 He was teaching in Cornwall when he received a message on his new Facebook page asking if he would teach tai chi at a primary school. Tackling this venture led him in a new direction and he has now been teaching tai chi in schools for many years. He is known to many children as Mr Tai Chi Man. He writes:

The school where I started teaching was large and requested classes for the entire school. Each year group had two classes so I spent every Monday all day for nearly a year teaching children of all ages from reception to key stage (KS) two.

I started off in a formal tai chi suit and taught in a fairly structured way. There was lots of rote teaching of the form but it occurred to me early on that that was not really working for all children, despite children being very good physical mimics. In that sense I was teaching the form or the external look of tai chi, not the internal principles on which it was based and which formed my own practice. So, I decided to get more creative.

A turning point was reading Stuart Alve Olson's book, *Tai Chi for Kids*. He was a student of T.T.Liang and had also tried teaching children the moving form but he decided that individual moves with animal names worked best, such as white crane spreads wings. This was really helpful. There were hardly any books on teaching tai chi to children, so any clues were useful. I was lucky too, as my wife was an experienced early years teacher and was able to offer good advice.

Traditionally, children start off in 'hard' kung fu styles and then in later life moved into the 'soft styles' such as tai chi. However, I did know that tai chi had been passed down in families and therefore presumably had been taught to children. Even with my rote teaching of the form I had had some good success with engaging children, who seemed intrigued with the moves. So, I evolved some different strategies and realised a few things early on; the major one being that tai chi needed to be fun. It also needed to be very much 'in the moment' and allow for creativity. It needed to appeal to children's imagination. So I started to use visual images to engage their interest and created tai chi games.



I have now developed a flexible approach to teaching tai chi to children. This differentiates between early years (reception age) and KS1 and KS2. With





With younger children, I quickly realised that basing games that taught tai chi principles with animal moves worked well. Children found this fun and could relate to the moves better, such as practising 'empty stepping' by emulating a tiger or playing games that taught the benefits of softness or looseness in the limbs.

With older children, working over time, I realised that the qi or the energy fascinated them the most and this became my teaching focus. Most children were readily able to 'feel the qi' and were motivated to learn more tai chi and qigong to engage and develop the sensations. Another important aspect with older children that evolved was partner work, a key part of learning tai chi.

I evolved what I did over a long time, developing many games and much freestyle fun. I learnt to be more spontaneous in my teaching and it was a privilege and joy to teach children, though also hard work. I used a lot of feedback forms early on and feedback stated that a high percentage of the children really enjoyed tai chi.

Many of the children's class teachers gave feedback that children improved in their ability to listen and engage with their school work following tai chi sessions, which seemed a strong motivation to continue. Overall, there was often a marked improvement in children's ability to remain calm which was a key benefit of the 'relaxation and letting go' activities. I surmised that school was often very cerebral and that practising the embodiment principles of tai chi had a positive impact on children's health and wellbeing. Children learn through tai chi to be soft and relaxed, to

yield



and collaborate. Teaching children the internal principles became the most useful elements and made the classes distinct from other exercise. Yoga has become popular to teach children in schools and it is my firm belief that tai chi should also sit alongside this. Qigong and yoga are very similar fundamentally, with tai chi also offering opportunities for partner work. When tai chi is taught without competition, promoting cooperation (think tai chi's 'sensing hands' practised correctly to train softness and sensitivity) partner work and games appeals to older children.

With younger children, group games work well and sometimes have been created on the spot by the children themselves. I have found children to be very receptive to tai chi, relaxed in their bodies, generally more open minded to the concepts of energy and more readily able to feel it. They do not have years of chronic tension to undo, which adults have built up from life experiences. Lack of bodily tension equates to more qi flow. Children can be open hearted generally and, in my experience, it is important to teach from the heart too; to listen to children and to respond to what interests them and engages them.

Over the years, I have had many enquiries asking me how to teach tai chi to children and I have trained teachers in schools and at workshops in conferences around the country. I think for it to work well, class teachers need to have an understanding of what tai chi is and what principles it is built on. Then they can add their own expertise. Tai chi practitioners should have that foundation and use it to consider how they might work with children to convey what they know and what they have to teach.

Due to all the enquiries, I have written a book to cover these two aspects, the philosophical and the practical aspects for educationalists as well as tai chi players. I hope the book will help schools to bring tai chi into the curriculum and support tai chi practitioners and parents who want to teach children this wonderful practice. ☯

Tai Chi For Schools: A Guide For Teachers, Practitioners And Parents
Published by Aeon Books

Moving forward...

All directors are required to resign every four years but may stand for re-election. This year there has been a big change to the board and something of a re-organisation. TCC&IA thought it would be a good idea to give members a run-down on who our current directors are, what their backgrounds are and how they think

Mark Peters

Having ‘dabbled in a few martial arts Mark Peters came across Danny Connors book *Tai Chi and tai chi qigong*. He says: “It answered all my questions and drove me to want to know more.”

He started training with Nigel Sutton and then one of Sutton’s students John Higginson eventually becoming a ‘closed door’ student of Nigel Sutton. This opened up access to higher level teachers.

Mark says: “Peter Ralston also inspired me in his commitment to effortless power so I travelled to experience this first hand. Seeing and feeling real tai chi skills taught in an accessible way still inspires me to this day. There are no secrets beyond mindful training, in my mind.”

Mark believes that the union can unite practitioners, driving continuous quality improvement: “There are so many people saying they ‘do tai chi’ but few really are. Forms are just choreography. Yang Cheng Fu said: ‘not all tai chi is real tai chi, real tai chi has a different flavour’. I believe that. Qigong is the same. Mindful breathing alone doesn’t really make it qigong.

“The union can improve people’s awareness and understanding of the arts. I believe in the purpose it was originally formed for, felt I could help it continue to develop. There is an old saying ‘No one ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and they’re not the same person’ (Heraclitus). Lockdown proved how flexible members are as well; over 75% easily switched to online. Everything changes and the TCUGB needs to

Tina Faulkner Elders

Tina Faulkner Elders studied kungfu from an early age. But, she says, she was inspired watching her father (Gordon Faulkner) practising tai chi ‘constantly’. She says that she just loved the movements. “I was maybe around 12 when I started with tai chi and qigong. I had already been involved with what I now know to be neidan practices. The feeling of listening and guiding and putting this into movement really struck a chord with me.”



Tina joined the union in 2015 and joined the executive board in 2020. “I wanted to become involved to help raise the awareness of tai chi and qigong. There still seems to be this mystery about tai chi so a great many people shy away from it. The reality is that it does cover a great range from martial to health to spiritual and philosophical. Whatever angle you approach it from, tai chi is hugely beneficial to anyone who takes up the art.”

change too, traditional does not mean static.

“It will continue to be the leading members’ organisation supporting the development of tai chi and qigong, freely without affiliation to one system or style.”

With a background in engineering and mechanical design Mark became an operations director with a focus on operations and change management. This led him to study psychology and NLP. He believes his ‘soft skills’ and change management background will help the union to continue its development and become more customer focused. He says: “As the TCUGB is non-partisan and non-style/system specific, its focus is on inclusion and continuous quality improvement. This means it is best placed to support practitioners of tai chi chuan, qigong and internal martial arts, bringing them together. As part of its CIC commitment, the TCUGB will continue to work to improve public awareness be that in deeper study of the arts and/or mental and physical well-being.”



Betty Sutherland

Betty Sutherland started learning tai chi in 1994 in what she describes as a last ditch attempt to learn how to manage work related stress. She says: “I tried tai chi and fell in love with it instantly, even my boss noticed the improvement. I also had a very bad back due to a horse riding accident and limped into a tai chi class.”

She first studied with Ian Cameron, in Edinburgh, which led her to a 28 year love of tai chi.

For Betty the purpose of the union is to support tai chi and qigong practitioners through responsible and inclusive governance.

She says: “I was encouraged to join the board by a good friend who had been on the board through some dramatic times. I now see that the union has the opportunity to become



more inclusive and welcoming, and working for its members.

“Now that the union is a CIC (community interest company) we are in a position to reach out to people and groups in the community. The union is here to support teachers’ development and offer a safe, high standard of tai chi across the UK.

“I originally came from an equestrian background, where I was working in riding schools and studs, competing and teaching horse riding. However, a serious fall led me to a change of career (and to tai chi). When I’m not practising or teaching tai chi I am riding and doing horse related chores. Tai chi is very good for my core strength (to help with mucking out).”

Ben Morris

Ben Morris has been practising tai chi since 2005. Having practised judo he had become interested in the ‘elusive’ concepts around ‘chi’ and the internal arts. It seemed that tai chi was one of the key arts in this area. There was also an appeal to practising a martial art that did not require a dojo and partners; at times both can be hard to come by.

He says: “I think the union should be a leading representative for tai chi and qigong practitioners in the UK. It should also interact with other governing bodies in Europe and farther afield.

“Joining the board was suggested to me for several years. I finally decided that now was a good time to offer my time and efforts to realising the goals of the union. I feel that with so many board member changes over recent years there is now an opportunity to reboot the union and return to some of the early vision.”

Ben is a senior lecturer in psychology and a researcher in



the area of health and wellbeing. In recent years he has focused some of his research time on understanding the benefits of mindful practices and tai chi. He says that he hopes to produce guides on how to interpret findings from research being produced globally on tai chi.

He says: “The union’s more recent CIC restructuring will also give a more regional voice to members and support them in their own projects where there is clear benefit to the promotion of tai chi and qigong. This can only be positive in my mind.”

Peter Ballam

Peter Ballam spent some time seeking a tai chi teacher eventually joining Ian McMillan in Hove. After attending workshops run by Dan Docherty he says: “I was hooked.”

He sees tai chi as a no nonsense martial art but with elements of training that are also beneficial for physical and mental health.

An early member of the union, joining in 1992 (his membership number is 36) he became a committee member in 2010.

Peter says: “I liked the idea that tai chi practitioners could come together as a community. There has been a massive increase in the interest in tai chi chuan and qigong and the numbers of people teaching. There is much less emphasis on tai chi chuan being taught as a martial art and it has become more commercially focused.

“I think that the differences between tai chi chuan and qigong have become confused. I would like to see tai chi chuan and qigong reclaim their own identities and dispell the current confusion. They are both a good form of exercise and in the case of tai chi chuan, an effective martial art for those seeking and prepared to commit to the training.”



CIMSPA: your questions answered

We collated the comments and questions from members and from the TCUGB FB forums which has led to this document to better explain the aims, purpose, and potential impact for our members

First a brief history as some may not be aware. Working with CIMSPA (Chartered Institute for Management of Sports and Physical Activity) was proposed by Keith Sharp in 2017. At the 2016 AGM he highlighted the need to work with the department of health and others as part of the TCUGB aims and visions under our CIC responsibilities. At the 2018 AGM an update was given and, at the 2019 AGM, CIMSPA made a presentation and answered members’ questions. The partnership between the TCUGB and CIMSPA was agreed in September 2019. A standards development committee was formed to include representatives of the TCUGB, CIMSPA, and allied professionals. The BCCMA became involved in 2020. Draft standards went to public consultation and have gone through many refinements to ensure quality and inclusivity. Covid slowed progress. The two standards were formally issued in May 2022. The next step is to identify assessors and set up pathways.

It seems that some members believed this partnership

will restrict or control the teaching of tai chi chuan and/or qigong. But from the very beginning we have always been clear it is intended only to be a quality improvement process in the sports and physical activity sector (e.g. gyms) and NHS patient rehabilitation sectors. Plus, the standards intentionally do not cover weapons, martial application, push-hands and other areas of the complete arts. It will not affect community classes run in church halls, parks or similar. It will not affect practitioners of traditional Chinese martial arts. For anyone familiar with REPs (register of exercise professionals), CIMSPA is replacing all of that to bring the industry together. Industry leading organisations such as EMD UK are members of CIMSPA.

For those interested in attending or providing courses that meet the standards, there are two parts:

- 1) Core coaching – for example BCCMA coaching course, and group exercise instructor course.
- 2) Technical standard – tai chi and/or qigong technical

CIMSPA FAQ

standards.

Core coaching is how to teach, safe-guarding, A&P etc.; Technical standards are the course content.

The Q&A listed below is intended to answer specific questions from members; they have been answered by CIMSPA and TCUGB as appropriate. More information will follow as it becomes available.

CIMSPA / TCUGB Q&A's re new standards

1. I have applied to CIMSPA for membership and there is currently no tai chi category, they suggest I could possibly apply via a coaching category. I have reported I have an advanced instructor's certificate and am waiting a reply. Is there a specific method of applying for CIMSPA membership with regard to TCUGB membership?

Not currently; CIMSPA and TCUGB are working out the best way to provide the service to you, so you don't have to have two separate memberships. Please retain your membership with TCUGB as they are best placed to look after you.

2. How do I apply for Assessment and Certification through the partnership? *You can't currently; information on this process will be published when available.*

3. Are TCUGB gradings transferable? *TCUGB is working on mapping across the grades and will advise in due course.*

4. What does it cost to be a CIMSPA member? And annual ongoing? *Practitioner membership is £30 annually, plus the annual CPD requirements.*

5. How do I submit training courses? *You can apply to be a training provider partner of CIMSPA here: Become a CIMSPA Training Provider Partner. Course will need to align to the core coaching requirements and technical standards. More details to follow.*

6. What is the cost? Initial and ongoing? *£250+VAT application fee £250+VAT per course you'd like endorsed. £250+VAT per course annually to renew your endorsement.*

7. How should the membership involved in the health and well-being sector respond to the new TCUGB CIMSPA professional standard? *Clearly, there is an opportunity for those involved in teacher training to get their provision accredited. We would advise people delivering training to align to the new standard and seek CIMSPA endorsement. TCUGB will work together with CIMSPA to provide an individual membership package that means individuals will not need to join each organisation separately and incur two sets of fees. This may take some time but graduates of endorsed training courses should be directed to TCUGB membership while CIMSPA and TCUGB develop the opportunity for individuals.*

8. Have the standards now been published and where? *Here: Professional standards library (cimspa.co.uk) links for each are tai chi standard and qigong standard.*

9. Is the idea that TCUGB members should also join CIMSPA? *CIMSPA would prefer a partnership approach with TCUGB, rather than requiring individuals to have two separate memberships and two sets of fees. Involvement with CIMSPA and the standards is not a requirement of TCUGB membership and may not be of interest or suitable for many TCUGB members.*

10. Will CIMSPA membership be compulsory? *Definitely not. As stated in Q9 above, CIMSPA membership may not be suitable or of interest to many TCUGB members.*

11. Can CIMSPA education partners just offer courses against the tai chi and qigong standards? *All courses need to be assessed/mapped against the standards before provision. All providers would require endorsement for their graduates to access TCUGB and CIMSPA's membership registers.*

12. Many of us have worked in the health and well-being sector for decades, yet do not have CIMSPA membership, or certification from any CIMSPA accredited instructor training programme, or a BCCMA coaching award. Is there any advice for this cohort of TCUGB members? *This is currently under review between TCUGB and CIMSPA to identify transferable experience and qualifications (APL). CIMSPA have a similar situation with chartered managers and here is the approach they have taken so everyone can access chartered status (www.cimspa.co.uk)*

13. If an individual, delivering tai chi or qigong, can now apply for CIMSPA membership then why would they need to continue to belong to the TCUGB? *TCUGB is the expert in tai chi and qigong; the value you get from it will be far greater than anything you would get from a non-specific governing body or membership organisation.*

14. Who will be deciding/agreeing the standard of the tai chi or qigong being delivered by the person delivering a CIMSPA-approved course and how will that happen? *CIMSPA will endorse training providers who deliver TCQ courses, with support from TCUGB on all technical elements. The TCUGB will have to sign-off on the technical elements.*

15. What qualification/certification will be available? *A range of opportunities all aligned to the professional standard the TCQ experts have written.*

16. Are we to become persona non grata unless we become accredited by CIMSPA? *No, it is more important you are recognised by TCUGB.*

17. I am unclear about who is going to assess and decide on the actual tai chi qigong standards. I am hoping for some clarity about that? *The standards have been written and agreed by leading experts in TCQ. Assessments for mapped courses is yet to be formalised as it will require suitably experienced people with assessor qualifications.*

18. What level do the standards start? Will there be different levels of teachers? *The standard sets the minimum benchmark, many people will exceed it but there are no further levels planned for development.*

19. Does CIMSPA's higher level chartered membership indicate that the member is considered an expert in their field? *Yes. Criteria will have to be met to achieve this and is currently under development.*

20. How are the new standards likely to affect typical TCUGB instructor's ability to trade and make a living as a tai chi/qigong instructor? *If TCUGB instructors were not affected by REPs then they will not be affected by CIMSPA as the standards apply to specific settings and contexts.*

21. What teaching settings are CIMSPA certified instructors likely to target? *Gyms, leisure centres, and special rehab settings based on their specific skillset (e.g. acquired brain injury, COPD, cardiac rehab, and falls prevention).*

22. Will teaching tai chi and qigong through the CIMSPA process lower the quality being taught? *No, TCUGB core standards will apply*

We hope this has gone some way to put your mind at rest over the value and purpose of the standards and TCUGB CIMSPA partnership. The project is ongoing, and more updates will be issued as they become available. Please note, should any 'loss of trading' seem to occur due to CIMSPA regulations, the TCUGB board should be alerted immediately. The TCUGB is not responsible for any members' earnings but would want to assess the reasons and changes that could have led to any impact. ☯





It's strictly tai chi

Robert Murray

Tai chi and Argentine tango are concerned with movement, balance, posture and control. Both are art forms. Tai chi is said to have a history going back more than a 1,000 years; tango is about 120 years old. Just on that basis tango has a lot to learn from tai chi. Tai chi is performed by an individual but, for me, is enhanced by accompanying students. Tango is performed in the embrace of another person and seeks to interpret the music. Both can be performed mindfully

UNESCO defined the tango that developed in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, around 1900, as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. Tango being defined as the dance, the music and the poetry. Despite Uruguay's contribution, that definition is referring to Argentine tango. [In 2020 Unesco gave the same accolade to tai chi. Unesco dates tai chi from the mid 17th century.]

There is naturally artistic development and nuevo tango encompasses changes in the music (Astor Piazzolla (2) and many modern orchestras) and changes in the dance (Frumboli, Naveira, Salas (3)). To abandon the music and its artistic development and to use alternative music is, for me, to abandon tango completely.

For a non-Spanish speaker, the poetry (the lyrics of the songs) is not very accessible. However there are translations available (4) and on many occasions in the history of tango, the fascist government of the time banned many songs and the slang language (lunfardo) that was used (5). Tango was the music and dance of the poor and was their escape at the end of a week of hard work. The lyrics were an outlet for lost love and social and political repression. The history of tango is bound up with the politics of Argentina and is a fascinating study.

This article focuses on how a study of the practice of tai chi can benefit the tango dancer.

Tai chi – Looking for the Golden Needle

Yang Cheng-fu (1883-1936 AD) gave us ten principles to observe when we practise tai chi. A number of these can also apply to the tango.

We can immediately apply three of them. One: *suspend your head from above and keep it up straight*, three: *loosen your waist and drop the pelvis* and four: *drop your shoulders and sink your elbows* are just good posture. I despair of those men in tango who have their left hand into their own neck so that the left elbow is projected horizontally. This is incredibly dangerous but ensures space not otherwise available to them. Any sensible lead keeps their partner well clear of such aggressive dancing.

In the old days anybody showing the sole of the shoe, as in boleó or gancho, would be asked to leave the milonga. While that is no longer appropriate, I do wish somebody was in charge of floorcraft and dangerous embraces, although they would be very busy.

In tango the chest of the lead is crucial in communication to the follower and so breathing high into the chest can be an important factor and used to signify the end of a pause. Point two: *depress your chest and raise your upper back* is not for tango.

Point five: *distinguish between being solid and empty* is useful since most of the time we are on our axis on one leg (solid) with the other leg free (empty). This is a difficult, but essential, part of following, allowing the non-standing leg to be empty (belonging to the lead).

I think point six: *apply your will and not your force* is

“In the old days anybody showing the sole of the shoe would be asked to leave the milonga

beautiful. As a lead, I don't want to be pushing and pulling my follower around the floor. I want to make suggestions as to what might come next, which might indeed be obvious to my follower if we are both feeling the music in the same way. There must be something physical in my lead, but not force. There is never need to contract muscles, unless embarking on a spectacular lift, taking the weight of the follower. More useful is the idea of extending the muscles which gives a relaxed control of the posture.

Standing in a typical tango posture ready to embrace or in a yang position (more exactly hun yuan), arms forward at shoulder height and curved, explore the extension of the muscles of the back. This takes away the weight of the arms and gives strength to the posture. It is possible to stand in such a posture for considerable time. Try the yang pose for five minutes, then longer and soon you will be in place for an hour and meditating. As soon as you start to contract muscles you will tire quickly.

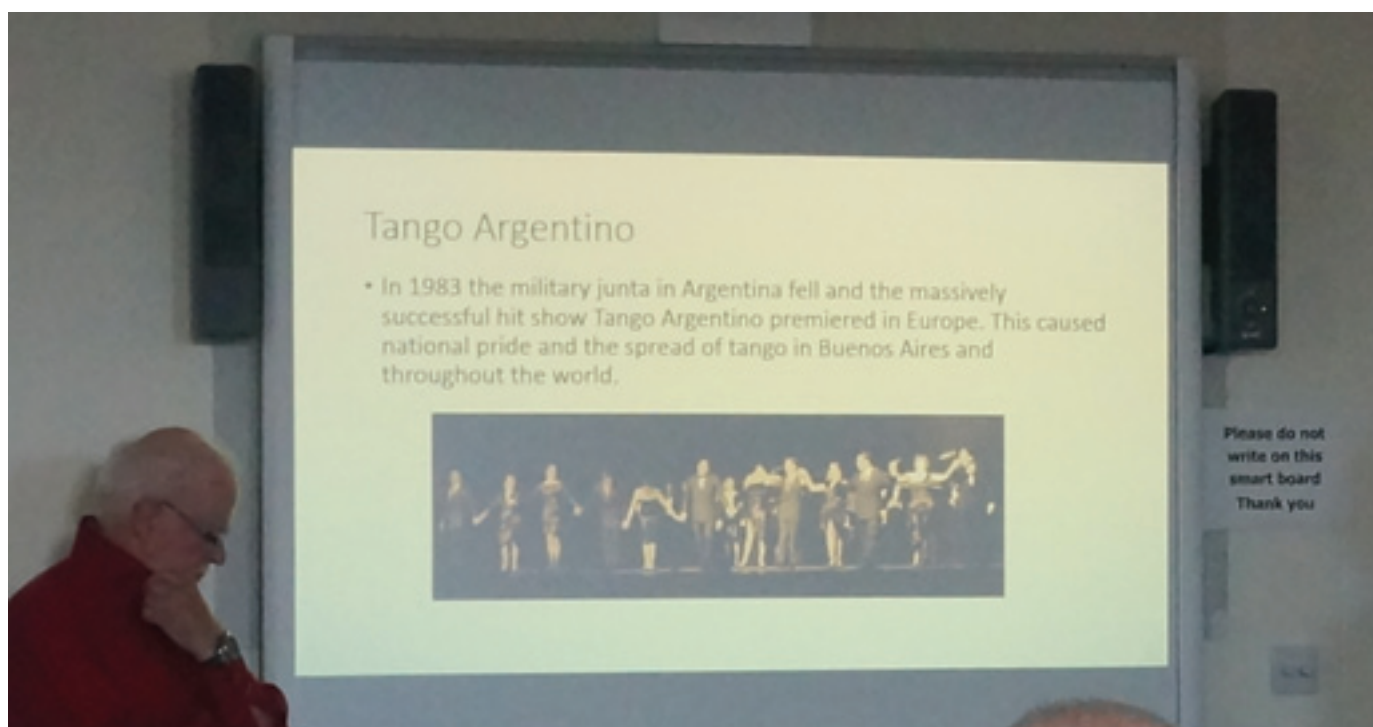


Point seven: *co-ordinate your upper and lower body movements* deals with dissociation. We can only walk in the direction our hips point us, unless we are side-stepping. A leg moving out at an angle is not tango. Our chest will be controlling where our partner is moving.

Point eight: *unify your external and internal movements* is about control, that we actually move where we want to move.

Point nine: *there must be absolute continuity in the movements* is clearly what we want to achieve, as in tango it is the music that will direct us. In tai chi we have names for different positions and we can practise getting into those positions but when we are moving through the form (a learnt series of moves), those positions are just transient.

We can be serene (point ten: *seek serenity in activity*) in both tai chi and tango if we are not overly concerned with what comes next. We need to learn the form in tai chi so that it comes naturally. In tango we need to maintain improvisation by using only those steps that we have made our own, that come naturally (7). If we move mindfully we will be serene. One of the tenets of tai chi is achieving serenity through activity. To be serene is often taken as stillness as part of the tranquility necessary. By moving



Robert Murray gives a presentation on the influence of the musical Tango Argentina which greatly influenced the popularity of the Argentine tango worldwide

through the form one can achieve a state of mind, accurately described as serene. There is no thought as to what comes next in the form, just a confidence that what is next will just come.

In tango we have the benefits, or complications, of a

'The vital quality of sung is lost by students who egotistically strive to 'look good'

partner, the music and the inherently spontaneous nature of the dance, so do we want to be serene in tango? I would suggest the music tells us (8). Certainly not in a milonga, which is fast, fun, grounded and dirty.

There is much lovely music which is certainly serene. As dancers we should always reflect the music and so, in the act of dancing with someone who feels the same about the music, that state of serenity can be achieved. Movements need not be planned but will happen in concert with the partner. As a leader I have to transcend thinking about what steps to use and dance as simply as possible and from the heart.

Sung

Sung is the concept of being totally relaxed while being alert. In tai chi and some other martial arts, practitioners strive for this state. An animal waiting for its prey to emerge from hiding, is in this state and can remain thus for hours.

'The vital quality of sung is lost by students who egotistically strive to 'look good' during their performance to the detriment of their energy flow'. [Written by Tony

Henrys and transcribed by John Gent. February 1992]

This could equally apply to dancing tango. What is important, is not what onlookers see, but what partners feel when they dance truly together. In the 'old days' if a couple were dancing to clearly impress the onlookers, the Milongueros would toss some small coins onto the floor.

In the close embrace the follower should be striving for sung. The follower could be in the perfect physical position (maybe placed there by a teacher) and comfortable and confident that all is correct. However if the follower is not in the right mental state then a meaningful connection may not be achieved. Of course, if the lead is not cherishing the follower and giving protection, then sung



◀ 23

will be impossible. Equally if the follower is thinking, "I don't like being close to this person" or "when are we going to dance fancy steps" the connection will not be there. Believe me, leaders can sense their followers mental state as well as their physical presence, and I am sure the reverse is also true.

Sung is an enhanced state of mind and body, it is NOT the follower simply switching off.

I think these thoughts can be useful in achieving connection.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises when we pay attention, on purpose, to the present moment, non-judgementally.

Mindfulness is a skill that can be developed and practised and there are books to help (10).

In tai chi, being fully aware of one's own movements and breathing, being in the zone, gives the performance of the form a different feeling.

In dancing tango, we have more factors imposed on us. We must give attention to our partner, the people dancing around us and, of course, the music.



If dancing with a new partner this may take up a lot of our attention. Sometimes everything feels right and the connection and movement to the music is as good as it gets. As a couple we have a good chance of dancing mindfully provided others on the floor are dancing to the codigos of good floorcraft. Counter intuitively in some very crowded milongas, mindfulness can be achieved. In such places as Salon Canning in Buenos Aires, there is very little space. To stretch out an arm and swing it around would contact about six people and draw angry comments. One has to dance in close embrace and maintain that throughout the tanda. There is possibly only three or four moves that you feel, as a newcomer to these conditions, that you can execute safely. As a connected couple you move with the flow of the group in which

everybody is listening to, and interpreting, the music. You become part of the whole. It is like being in the audience and listening to your favourite orchestra playing. Your appreciation is so much enhanced above simply listening at home to a DVD of the same orchestra. Certainly if you watch such a group dancing and pick out a couple, you can expect to see them again in about five or ten minutes when they have completed a circuit. They will be the same distance into the group as when you first saw them. Couples move in lanes around the floor.

If you dance with a favoured partner with whom you have a good connection and have a series of preferred moves, then the chance of moving mindfully to the music is much enhanced. Such occasions are to be cherished.

Elasticity

Many of the movements in tai chi involve using the elastic properties of the limbs. Every pivot in tango uses the torsion that can be built up by dissociating the top half of the body from the bottom half. This results in a smooth pivot rather than just throwing the body around.

The use of the elastic embrace is a relatively new technique with the lead pushing the follower away and using the momentum of the follower returning towards the lead in a variety of subsequent moves.

Summary

As an ancient art form tai chi has much to offer in terms of body awareness, control and the dynamics of movement. The smooth control of weight moving from one leg to the other and the necessary posture enables the practitioner to look elegant while being strong in all positions. A study of tai chi can only be of benefit to students of Argentine tango. 🇦🇷

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Acknowledgements

Debbie Spencer and Bob Fenner are inspirational tai chi teachers. There are many tango teachers, whose classes and workshops I have benefitted from and enjoyed. However the first continuous classes in Nottingham from Cidinha and Njall Bendixen (Luna y Molino) gave a foundation that has not needed changing.



Wudang lineage

Wudang tai chi chuan (Wudang taijiquan) was developed by master Cheng Tin Hung (Zheng Tianxiong) and taught from his school in Hong Kong. It is a complete and fully integrated system comprising hand form, push hands, neigong, three weapons forms (spear, sabre and sword) and martial applications

Wudang tai chi chuan should not be confused with Wudang ch'uan (Wudangquan), which comprises all of the internal martial arts traditionally practised in the Wudang Mountains, in the Hubei province of China.

Cheng Tin Hung gave his art this name in honour of Chang San-Feng (Zhang Sanfeng), the legendary Daoist monk said to have created tai chi chuan around 800 years ago.

More recently, to avoid confusion with other styles, Wudang tai chi chuan has become known as 'Cheng style', after the master himself.

Cheng Tin Hung was born in 1930 and died in 2005. He began learning tai chi chuan in 1947 from his uncle, Cheng Wing-kwong (Zheng Rongguang). Cheng Wing-kwong was a teacher in the Wu school and disciple of Wu chien-chuan (Wu Jianquan), the founder of Wu Style.

Cheng Tin Hung went on to train with Qi Minxuan, who taught him the complete tai chi chuan syllabus. Although Qi Minxuan's lineage traces back to Wu Quanyou, he never claimed that what he taught Cheng Tin Hung was the Wu family style. While there is no doubt Cheng Tin Hung was influenced by his uncle, his art is quite different to Wu Style.



Betty Sutherland

Hung believed that actions speak louder than words. Therefore, he set out to prove that tai chi chuan could 'hold its weight' against different Chinese martial arts. Competing in several competitions, including the Southeast Asian wushu, he set a record of six victories in seven competitions. From 1971 through to 1981 he won several more championships in Chinese martial arts.



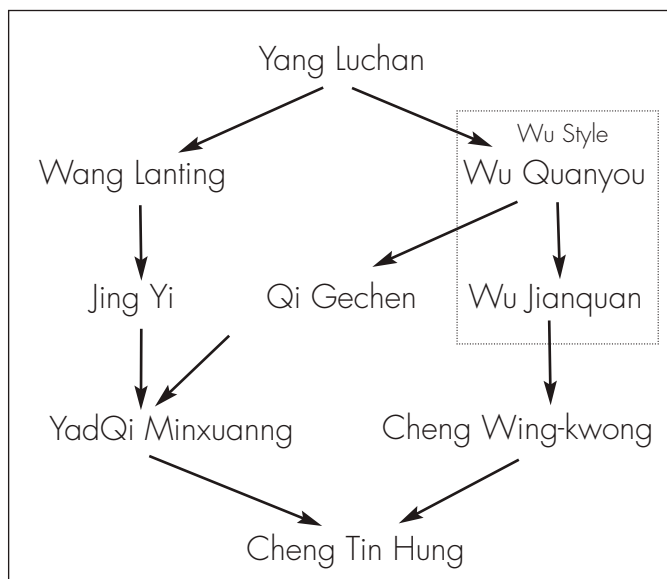
Cheng Tin Hung

I bring this history to you as an example of how Cheng Tin Hung wanted to get back to the original tradition of tai chi chuan as a living, practical art. The emphasis is on being able to react to change, rather than the minutiae of forms. This is reflected in the strong martial background seen in his teaching.

In 1972, Cheng Tin Hung, along with a number of other prominent tai chi teachers, founded the Hong Kong Tai Chi Association. The association worked with the Recreation and Sports Department of the Hong Kong Department of Education to set up morning tai chi classes. Teachers were mainly trained by Cheng Tin Hung. These early morning tai chi classes are widely held in various districts of Hong Kong to this day.

The Wudang tai chi chuan system was brought to Europe by two of Cheng Tin Hung's disciples: Ian Cameron, based in Scotland and the late Dan Docherty, both founding members of the TCUGB. Sifu Docherty held the position of chair in the union for many years.

After his sad passing in 2005, Cheng Tin Hung's system continues to be taught in Hong Kong by the Tai Chi Heritage school (www.hktaichi.com). The current head of the school is Cheng Tin Hung's son, Cheng Kam Yan, who continues his father's legacy by offering Cheng Tin Hung's tai chi to all. 🙏



The illustration shows a simplified lineage diagram, intended to highlight the key influences on Cheng Tin Hung's style of tai chi chuan

Research by: Betty Sutherland and Robert Tweed teaching and training in Wudang TCC in Yorkshire®
UK Tai Chi www.uktaichi.com Facebook UK Tai Chi

A photograph of two men practicing Tai Chi. The man on the left is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. The man on the right is wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and green trousers. They are in a dynamic pose, with the man in orange having his arms raised and the man in blue supporting him from below. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A tai chi fighter

Interview by Robin Gamble

Neil Rosiak has trained in tai chi chuan for over 30 years and has a wealth of competitive and combative experience. One of the first winners of the British Open push hands tournament he went on to win the Chuan Hua cup in Taiwan and was present in the formative years of mixed martial arts in London training with a wealth of professional fighters. He also worked as a bouncer for many years and had ample opportunity to put his training into practice. He runs classes in North London and can be contacted through his website:

www.neilrosiak.com

Overleaf ▶

I first asked Neil about his long and varied experiences in combative tai chi, from competing to coaching fighters. What is his background and how he got to where he is today.

He told me that his interest started when he watched his father practise tai chi. He said: “I was seven and I used to see him do these slow movements and it piqued my interest. I was aware it was a martial art.

“When I was ten, I started training in shotokan karate. Shortly after, I started northern praying mantis, in Archway London. It was a mixture of styles, it had the high kicks of taekwondo, the grappling of northern praying mantis and the throws and locks of ju jitsu. It was like an early form of MMA. There was rigorous sparring and conditioning, it was well designed. So at a young age I appreciated a practical approach.

“Some time after I read an article by Dan Docherty called *tai chi gladiator*. It detailed his full contact exploits in Hong Kong. The way he described the training, approach and philosophy it sounded comprehensive and something that would allow you to develop beyond your sheer athletic potential because of theoretical and philosophical concepts in the art.

“I met Dan and liked the training. I trained with him and started competing in push hands competitions. I did the 3rd British Open in around 1992. I won the British Open and then travelled to Taiwan to compete in the Jwang Hua cup. I had a good experience, I won all my matches. However, I came back and felt like I needed more of a challenge.”

Some time around 1995 Neil left Dan’s groups. It was about the same time that footage of the first UFC’s (ultimate fighting championships) were circulating. Neil says: “At that time I found Lee Hasdell who was an early competitor in MMA (mixed martial arts), a very physical and skilful guy, he’d been recruited to fight in the rings



tournament in Japan. Lee had been to Japan and learned catch wrestling and competed in early MMA events. He came back to the UK and was one of the first people to organise shoot fighting, so I went along to his training.

“It was a hardcore fighting environment. Which was different to Dan’s place, I think, like his master Chen Ting Hung, Dan had wanted to teach hardcore fighters but because of economic pressures had reduced the fighting aspect, perhaps to make it more palatable. You can’t train that way and have a busy class. Not everybody wants to train like that.”

It was with Hasdell that Neil learned the ground game (ground grappling and fighting) but says that his day to day training was still tai chi. “Later,” he says, “I met more MMA guys to train with, one named James would call us the London Shootfighters when we competed. Soon other guys joined us. I’d become a bouncer and more bouncers would come to the daytime sessions. It grew into its own thing and turned into London Shoot Fighters which is now one of the longest running and most successful MMA teams in the UK.”

Tai chi combat, like any fighting system, needs strength and conditioning. I asked Neil whether he thinks modern tai chi needs to incorporate strength conditioning methods.

“It is really important,” he replied, “but it doesn’t need to be supplemented with modern methods. From what I have come to understand looking at modern conditioning I am always astounded by the tai chi system from Chen Ting Hung. When I look at it from a sports science perspective it is impressive.

“In tai chi there is so much to be done, drills, push hands and sparring, the additional conditioning should be minimalist. There are a few core exercises that, if you do

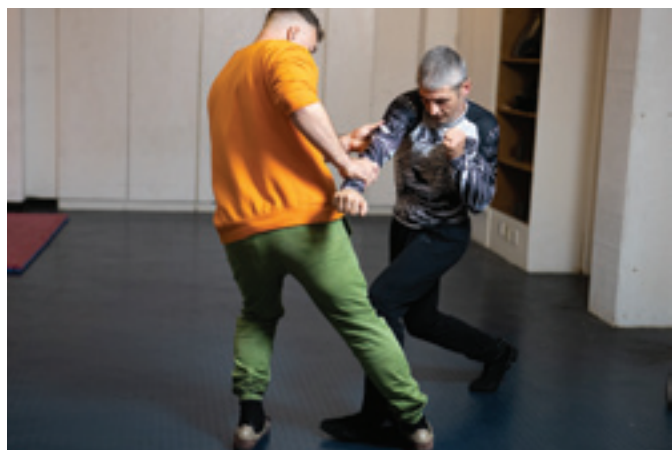


them well, you'll be rewarded with power, great speed and stamina. I remember when I was still with Dan training for a fight and I'd done this conditioning system for three months and then I'd go and spar really hard, we'd aim to knock each other out. It was brutal, I'd be going for ages, I just wouldn't get tired and I'd be knocking people out. I was amazed at how good the conditioning was. This is like they did in Hong Kong, that is why Chen Ting Hung was so successful. He had a great system but he knew 'specificity' was a real thing and if you wanted to be good at fighting you needed experience in real fighting.

"The neigong (internal training) is an amazing thing, it's a technique and power system and then wellbeing, I think even if you did side exercises on your own, you'd still become a beast."

A question that often comes up is the relationship between martial and health tai chi. If a tai chi practitioner is only interested in health benefits, is it important or necessary for them to learn the fighting aspects of tai chi chuan? Neil says that he doesn't think so: "But there are some things in the martial syllabus that could further develop your coordination, and it would build your cardiovascular system too. I remember reading some studies a while back and the factors that lead to a longer life, like longevity correlated with a strong V02 max (oxygen uptake) and, funnily enough, in our system there is a lot of interval training. Based on my understanding it is pretty obvious that would build your V02 max and therefore be very good for your health."

According to Neil there are a number of situations where tai chi techniques – its skills or tactics – have proved useful in a combative environment. He says: "In competition I have seen that tai chi, trained properly, is very useful. Perhaps more importantly as a bouncer I noticed in many situations, perhaps a couple of hundred, where rather than escalating to a situation where you are punching or kicking, I could easily control people using pushing hands



skills and things didn't escalate, and sometimes these are quite dangerous situations. Some of these are powerful people that have been armed, so if things escalate it can go badly wrong. I have found that if you use these techniques to control and restrain people and put them down with control and keep them in position it is infinitely useful.

"In fact Chen Ting Hung's son said to me that he has never had to hit people, he just controlled them.

"I think BJJ (Brazilian jiu jitsu) is great, but personally, I've never needed to be grappling on the floor. For me good wrestling skills have worked. I think, typically, grappling on the floor is the last place you want to be."

A tai chi practitioner can do a number of things to improve their combat performance. According to Neil practising combat is paramount. "The sad reality is, I've got a great bunch of guys who I train and I want them to reach their full potential, but I know they need to experience some full contact fighting to really forge their skills. So they have a full understanding of the reality of things, the speed, the power, and momentum of real combat. In turn, it will improve their form and their drilling will improve. I don't think you need to have many fights, maybe five to ten fights would do for most people. But when you are dealing with your friends it's difficult, you don't want to hurt them. That can limit your combat potential. Generally, in class, I keep the sparring light and playful, then those that want to take it to the next level should compete in full contact.

"In tai chi we have ting, hua and fa. Listening, neutralising and issuing. Essentially, you want to be able to read and listen to the situation, and then train yourself to react as well as possible and issue your own counter. It is systematic, working towards spontaneity. You can then ramp it up. Chen Ting Hung said that your partner should eventually be able to scream and shout and throw forceful techniques at you and you should be stillness in motion, emotionally unmoved. It takes a lot of training and then hopefully, one day, if something does kick off, it will be a natural response for you. That is the ideal of the drilling in our system; that coupled with a bit of light sparring for most people is going to be fine along with some wrestling and push hands. You can do that at high intensity. But to become the ultimate tai chi fighter you have to have fight experience, but it's not for everyone.

"There is probably an over emphasis on softness and a lack of respect for hardness in the general tai chi community," says Neil. "Look at all the karate guys and muay thai guys and there is a reason they are effective, they spar and they hit things hard. They have that yang intent. Tai chi should be no different in that respect. Of course we cultivate the soft aspect but we should also cultivate the

In a time and place when combat efficient martial arts like BJJ, muay thai and MMA are easily accessible we must consider why people should consider training tai chi as a martial art. Neil says: “BJJ is good as a martial sport With the exclusion of old more self defence based BJJ schools, I don’t think it’s really a self defence-art. The others (muay thai and MMA), are really good for building fighters but they are ring sports, good for combat athletes. They may not have those emergency, efficient self defence techniques. Technically, tai chi done properly, using all the methods and theory, could potentially allow a person to keep developing just beyond their natural athleticism that the other arts rely on.

“There are subtleties and efficiencies built into the tai chi system that allow someone to develop high levels of effectiveness fairly quickly regardless of size. You could just train the combat side of tai chi and it probably wouldn’t look much different to MMA, but the rest of the system, the internal strength, the forms, the weapons, they would enable you to develop your coordination and movement to higher levels and there is a lot of training that helps you develop a relaxed state of mind during combat; it may enhance your ability to be more spontaneous to achieve a flow state.

“There is also mental and movement training that may allow someone to achieve a higher level of performance. Let alone the recovery methods. Then you have the strategic information in the classics, it’s really useful when applied. A good MMA coach would have that, but in tai chi it’s built in. Also, in today’s world the older Asian philosophies could be looked upon as an antidote to the current attitudes in martial sports: narcissism and shallowness.”

Asked to describe what does great tai chi look like when applied in combat Neil replied

“I often used to look at the boxer Prince Naseem; his evasion skills were amazing and the way he punched, from his legs. He would evade with the upper body and then use his legs and explode. I thought he was a good example of a tai chi fighter. Another is Joe Louis. He was hard to hit, perfectly balanced and threw punches like a tai chi fighter should. Fedor Emeleinko’s tai chi qualities were that he was very calm and neutral and able to adapt to anything and that is meant to be the idea in tai chi, adaptability and fighting them where they are weak. And Fedor was a master at that and he could seamlessly transition from punches to grappling to a throw and back.

“So somebody who trains in our system should have that kind of goal. I think that would be an advantage over perhaps other MMA systems in that everything is designed to be integrated from day one, whereas I know many MMA people separate out the other disciplines, they’ll be using boxing here and BJJ there.

“Saenchai (legendary muay thai fighter), also has fluid movement, accurate striking, creativity and spontaneity. Many people miss the point that tai chi should be spontaneous. Regardless of their level everybody has two arms and two legs, at the highest level it is no different.”

In the past two years Neil reckons he has made a few game changing discoveries. He started training with Chen Ting Hung’s son and has done a lot of research with him. He says: “Firstly the internal strength training I did with Dan was very useful. But I’ve completely relearned it now with Yan, the son. It is significantly different; it makes more sense to me now. So, the relearning internal training has taken things to a whole other level for me.

“The other thing is re-learning all the traditional self



defence applications with Yan. Chen Ting Hung taught a system of 48 self defence drills. I wanted to make sure I had those correct along with the pushing hands exercises. Also the eight forces, just developing my full understanding of what they are and how they are applied. So all of that has been game changing and it’s all happened in the last few years.

“A lot of people think tai chi fighting is going to look like a movie. It is more than likely going to look like a guy fighting another guy. Fighting is fighting. Don’t expect mysterious chi power kind of stuff, it’s going to be the same as any fighter but ideally, it’s going to be a highly skilled fighter.”

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Pushing in Prague

This year the International Push Hands Meeting in Prague took place at a new venue. No longer on the picturesque island below the bridge over the River Vltava, this year it was farther east, in the TJ Sokol Vinohrady building. Helmut Oberlack reports



Tina Faulkner Elders takes the warm-up exercises

This is an old imposing structure set back from the main road and surrounded by trees. At the back are fields that are used for various activities including football. Inside, the marble floors and stairs lead to many rooms which have been repurposed for various sporting/gymnastic activities. The Taiji Akademie where the event took place is situated on the top floor and climbing the stairs in the humidity that we experienced that weekend proved to be a useful warmup.

The work area comprised a main room with a good wooden floor and a high ceiling. There was also a smaller room as well as an outdoor area which made a good practice spot in the fresh air.

The usual format was followed: a choice of two workshops each morning followed by free pushing sessions in the afternoon. The three teachers, Tina Faulkner Elders, Gordon Faulkner and Thomasz Nowakowski each took two workshops during the weekend.

We started with Tina Faulkner Elders taking us through the san quan, the three circles. This is a series of exercises for the hips, spine and shoulders or, more specifically, kua, jian and yao to develop a deeper understanding of internal and external structure through which to move force.

These were delivered with Tina's usual enthusiasm and lucid explanations of the method, detail and the purpose of each, together with warnings of common errors to be



watchful for.

The outdoor area on the roof was big enough to accommodate Tina's workshop. This was very welcome as it allowed us to work in the relatively cooler fresh air. It also allowed us to observe the rain in the distance getting closer and closer!

Meanwhile Gordon was inside leading his group through chu shou, touch hands. Gordon emphasised that the sense of touch is subtle but powerful and how the palms, and fingertips in particular, absorb much information and feeling and are used in reading their environment. Through a series of partner exercises he helped us experience how we can understand and respond in a push hands setting, the important aspect of this being not just to receive the information but how to interpret it.

Over the weekend we progressed to taiji qin na. Again we worked with partners under Gordon's guidance using the more subtle and internal principles of tai chi to manipulate joints and control limbs. As always with Gordon this was delivered in a clear, concise manner with a dash of his usual dry humour.

Thomasz' shapes of balance system has the basis that if you know a technique you know a technique but if you understand a concept you know a thousand techniques.

Using this approach we looked at some individual forms and their applications with a partner, comparing examples from the sang feng and Yang styles. This required us to investigate timing, structure, coordination and awareness in partner work.

The free push hands sessions in the afternoon followed the familiar format of timed ten-minute sessions. The participants were varied, from the totally inexperienced to the very experienced, from the sensitive to the very physical. All in all it was good for giving players the opportunity to work on just about every aspect of their pushing (and receiving).

Ivo had the extra-curricular activities well organised. There was a dinner organised on each night. On the first night the restaurant was a couple of tram stops away, so some opted out and smaller groups went their own way to eat and drink in some of the many good alternatives that were more convenient (it is Prague, after all).

On the Saturday Ivo had organised a meal in a nearby micro-brewery / restaurant which everybody attended. We were treated to some (very) good local beers and food, and good conversation, much to everybody's enjoyment.

After the pushing session on the Saturday we were treated to some demonstrations, not just from the three teachers, but from some of the participants as well. You can check these out on the website at

www.pushhands.cz

An interesting development on the final day was an announcement from Severin Berz from Switzerland. He is in the process of building a website which is a worldwide directory to provide easy access to information about push hands events: international meetings and workshops, but also regional meetings in parks and regular classes. A great way to find training buddies near wherever you happen to be, especially when travelling. The website is:

www.pushhands.com

and he also has a Facebook page for this at:

www.facebook.com/pushhandsdirectory

The whole Prague event was well-organised, as usual, by Ivo Marvan, Thomasz Nowakowski and Zofia Polak and ran very smoothly. Thanks, guys; looking forward to next year's. ☯



Odds at the End

And the things people say...

Starting and re-starting tai chi

The hardest thing to do in life is to start – anything. It can be even harder to re-start something you have stopped doing. A problem a lot of you have been facing this year. Covid, if not over, is no longer ruling our lives. 2022 has been described as: 'the first normal year since 2019'. But even with lockdown out of the question and in spite of digital and online classes many students dropped out and have not returned; something that is reflected in the union's membership.

The funny thing about tai chi though is how people do return. Sometimes after years. A student starting in his fifties once said: "I did this when I was 18 with an amazing master. But I think I was too young. In middle age he became a serious and dedicated practitioner who developed great skill. They are out there, the newbies and the ones who have just dropped out.

Our message for the world must be: "we're back!".

“Not all tai chi is real tai chi, real tai chi has a different flavour”

Yang Cheng Fu

Tai chi moves



“This is embarrassing. Vicar, you know we don’t like you practising tai chi in the church.”

The Scottish event

Save the date: talking about things coming back, after an absence of two years Tai Chi Caledonia returned this year to great acclaim. The event has been popular since its inception and 2023 should be no exception. Reckoned to be one of the biggest ‘festivals’ in Europe it attracts an international audience and features top-line teachers from the UK and the globe.

TCC offers delegates the chance to sample instruction in the full gamut of internal arts from tai chi and qigong to baguazhang and martial and weapons forms.

Held at Stirling University’s campus this year’s event runs from 14th July to 21st July.

www.taichicaledonia.com
bookings@taichicaledonia.com



Sword play in the car park. Margherita Paladino crosses swords with Gianfranco Pace, Tai Chi Caledonia 2022: back after two years of Covid lockdowns

Picture by Jenniffer Scott www.taichicaledonia.com

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